

This lucid discussion of the concept of "gender" in feminist discourse deals with questions like the relationship between "gender" and "woman"; the difference between "women and development" and "gender and development"; gender and patriarchy; and between gender, caste and class. A must for everyone, especially those working on gender training.

KAMLA BHASIN worked with the Freedom From Hunger Campaign of the FAO for over twenty years, and is a well-known gender trainer. She has written extensively on participatory training; on women; and on sustainable development. She has also written many songs on all these issues!

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Understanding Gender

Kamla Bhasin

gender **BASICS**

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an associate of
kali for women

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Although we have known the word **gender** in grammar, obviously it is being used differently now. Can you explain this new meaning ?

The word **gender** is now being used sociologically or as a conceptual category, and it has been given a very specific meaning. In its new incarnation **gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles.** It is used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men.

The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. For ages it was believed that the different characteristics, roles and status accorded to women and men in society, are determined by biology (i.e., sex), that they are natural, and therefore not changeable.

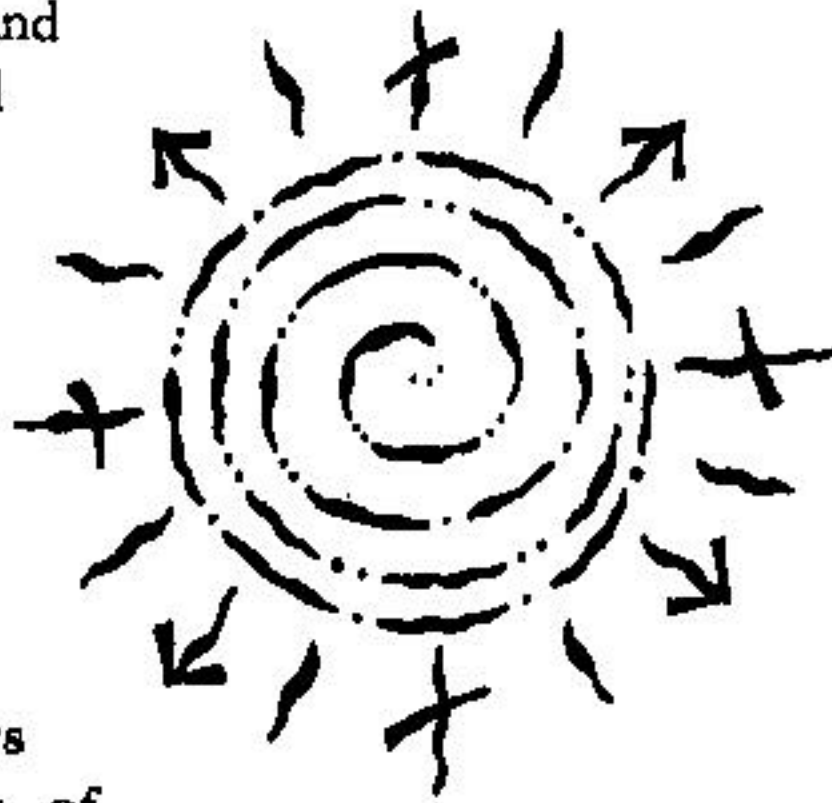
In a way women, and women's bodies, were and are held responsible for their subordinate status in society. Once this is accepted as natural, there is obviously no need to address the gender inequalities and injustice which exist in society.

The concept of gender enables us to state that sex is one thing, but gender is quite another.

Everyone is born male or female, and our sex can be determined simply by looking at our genitalia.

But every culture has its ways of valuing girls and boys and assigning them different roles, responses and attributes. All the social and cultural “packaging” that is done for girls and boys from birth onwards is “gendering”.

Each society slowly transforms a male or female into a man or a woman, into masculine and feminine, with different qualities, behaviour patterns, roles, responsibilities, rights and expectations. Unlike sex, which is biological, the gender identities of women and men are psychologically and socially — which means historically and culturally — determined.



Ann Oakley, who was among the first few feminist scholars to use this concept, says the following: “‘Gender’ is a matter of culture, it refers to the social classification of men and women into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.” That people are male or female can usually be judged by referring to biological evidence. That they are masculine or feminine cannot be judged in the same way: the criteria are cultural, differing with time and place. The constancy of sex must be admitted, but so also must the variability of gender.”¹ She concludes that gender has no biological origin, that the connections between sex and gender are not really ‘natural’ at all.

Let us see the main differences between these two terms.

SEX

Sex is natural

Sex is biological. It refers to visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function.

Sex is constant, it remains the same everywhere.

Sex cannot be changed.

GENDER

Gender is socio-cultural and it is man-made.

Gender is socio-cultural and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, roles and responsibilities, etc.

Gender is variable, it changes from time to time, culture to culture, even family to family.

Gender can be changed.

How does one translate gender into South Asian languages ?

This is indeed a problem. While English has two different words — sex and gender — most South Asian languages have only one word — “*linga*” used for both sex and gender. To distinguish between them we have found two words to qualify *linga*. For sex we say “*praakeritik linga*” or natural/biological sex, and for gender “*saamaajik linga*” or social sex. In fact this definition often works

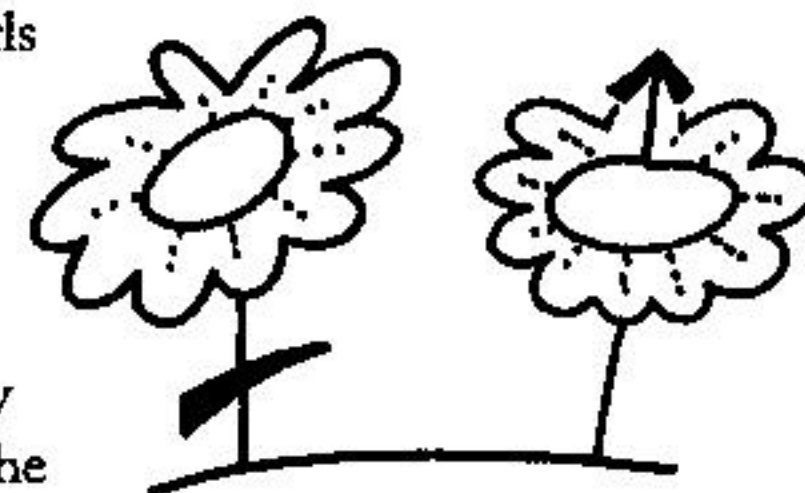
better than “sex” and “gender” because the terms themselves contain the definition, and so no further explanations are required.

But isn't gender closely related to our sex? Aren't the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences?

Only to some extent. Because of their bodies women, but not all women, bear children, feed them and menstruate; but other than this there is nothing they do that men cannot do or that men can do and women cannot. Bearing children does not mean that only women can or should look after them. Men can just as well do the caring. So just having male or female bodies does not necessarily have to determine our characteristics, roles, or destinies.

But in reality it is quite difficult to establish what is natural and what is socially constructed, because as soon as a child is born families and society begin the process of gendering. In many South Asian cultures the birth of a son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is bemoaned; sons are showered with love, respect, better food and better health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing, girls are encouraged to be demure and home-bound. There is nothing in a girl's body which stops her from wearing shorts, or climbing trees or riding bicycles, and there is nothing in a boy's body which stops him from playing with dolls, looking after younger siblings or helping with cooking or cleaning the house. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society. Proof of the fact that gender is a cultural and social attribute rather than a natural one, is that it keeps changing — over time, in different places and among different social groups. For example a middle class girl may be confined to the home or school while a tribal girl may roam around in the jungles freely, taking the animals for grazing, or climbing trees for fruits, leaves or branches. They are both girls but they develop very different capabilities, aspirations and dreams, in spite of the fact that their bodies are the same.

Similarly, in many families girls were traditionally not sent to school or allowed to go out of the house after they were 10 or 11, and were often married at puberty. But now things have changed. So too, the education, roles and responsibilities of men have changed, although perhaps not as much. This is what is meant when we say that gender is variable; it is or may be different in different families or communities and at different times in the same family.



Even our bodies can be shaped or changed by us, society or culture. We can change the size, shape and strength of our bodies through training, use, disuse, misuse or abuse. Obvious examples are bodies of male and female wrestlers, body-builders, athletes, dancers, yoga practitioners and so on.

Similarly, women's bodies are such that they can procreate, but we can now choose whether to have children, how many to have and at what intervals to have them. Reproduction is not inevitable in the same way for women as it is for female animals.

*If a woman can cook,
so can a man,
because a woman doesn't cook with her
womb!*

What follows from this is that the different status women and men enjoy in society is indeed socially and culturally determined; it is man-made, nature has very little to do with it. It is gender not sex which has determined that, (almost) everywhere, women as a group are considered inferior to men. They enjoy fewer rights, control fewer resources, work longer hours than men but their work is

either undervalued, or underpaid. They face systemic violence at the hands of men and society; and they have little decision-making power in social, economic and political institutions.

"No social order in history has extended, distorted and used the natural difference between the sexes as brutally and systematically as ours. This order first transformed natural sex into a social artificial gender, made 'men' out of men, and 'women' out of women — in fact, turned 'men' into the 'human race' and women into simply a sex as such ... And finally, having created these differences, it declares them to be 'natural' again, in order to render them economically exploitable." Claudia von Werlhof²

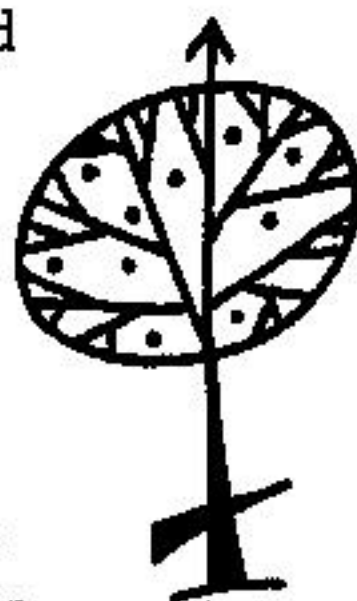
Every society prescribes different norms for girls and boys, women and men, which determine almost every aspect of their lives, and their futures. Let's just look at the more obvious ones.

Dress

Girls and boys, women and men dress differently in most societies. In some places this difference may be minimal, at others very stark. In some communities women are made to cover their bodies from top to toe, including their faces. The mode of dress can and does influence the mobility, sense of freedom and dignity of people.

Attributes

In most societies women are expected to have and perfect qualities such as gentleness, caring, nurturing and obedience; men are expected to be strong, self-confident, competitive and rational. Vasanth Kannabiran, an Indian feminist, once said in a gender training, "Rearing of children is supposed to be as natural, as inherent to a woman as giving birth to children. . . And it is not just in relation to the children we produce; it is assumed that love or



motherhood is sitting in me waiting to flow out like a stream to anybody who needs it. We become eternal mothers. So I mother my child, other people's children, my husband, my brothers, my sisters, my father who actually calls me 'my little mother' ! To everyone I become a mother by extension. You are expected to overflow with a motherly feeling towards the entire universe. And this is supposed to be natural ! Not work at all. It is something you do as easily as breathing, eating or sleeping." ³

Roles and responsibilities

Men are considered to be the heads of households, bread-winners, owners and managers of property, and active in politics, religion, business and the professions. Women, on the other hand are expected and trained to bear and look after children, to nurse the infirm and old, do all household work, and so on. This determines their education or lack of it, preparation for employment, nature of employment, etc. However, the degree of differentiation between male and female roles varies widely. Sometimes the rules are merely preferential, and very little anxiety is shown by either sex over temporary role reversals.

"Cora du Bois reports that in Alor, although there are distinctions between the economic roles of the sexes, it is not thought unhealthy for anyone to take on the other sex's work — rather they are admired for possessing a supplementary skill. The women control the subsistence economy and the men occupy themselves with financial deals, but many men are passionate horticulturists and many women have financial skills. In some cultures, on the other hand, where horticulture is defined as a female pursuit, a proclivity for it in a man is regarded as proof of sexual deviation. In yet others, a special category may even be created for females who excel in pursuits assigned to both sexes." Ann Oakley ⁴

Other societies impose rigid sex roles. The Mundurucu Indians of Central Brazil, again according to Ann Oakley, are an example of a society in which the polarisation of sex roles and sex groupings has become a primary social element. The physical and social separation of the sexes is virtually complete: men and boys live in men's houses separate from females. Each sex group, (with the exception of small children) interacts only within itself, and antagonism between the two is shown on many ritual and other occasions. The sexual polarity pervades not only economic tasks and social roles, but the area of personality as well, where it takes the form of a concern with dominance and submission. Anxiety about people's ability to stay within the prescribed sex roles and personality types, and about the real and imaginary desire to transcend them, is expressed in many pieces of folklore and ritual." ⁵

To the outsider, western societies seem to have very little gender differentiation, but as Ann Oakley points out, "In western societies today, sex is an organising principle of social structure, and despite popular belief to the contrary, it plays a great part in determining social roles. So it is not surprising to find that, as among the Mundurucu, a great deal of anxiety in western culture has its roots in the demands made by gender roles. Psychiatrists tell us that a great deal of our security as adults comes from staying within the boundaries of these roles — we must stay within them if mental health is to be preserved." ⁶



Could some of these differences arise because girls and women are biologically weaker?

Actually, biologically speaking men are the weaker sex and the Y chromosome (found only in men) is responsible for many handicaps.

A list given by Ashley Montagu in his book *The Natural Superiority of Women* contains 62 specific disorders due largely or wholly to sex-linked genes and found mostly in males. "About half of them are serious, and include haemophilia (failure of the blood-clotting mechanism), mitral stenosis (a heart deformity) and some forms of mental deficiency. . . . At every stage of life, beginning with conception, more genetic males die than genetic females. More males than females are produced and the two facts of greater mortality and greater production seem to go hand in hand."

Although X and Y sperms appear to be produced in equal numbers, between 120 and 150 males are conceived to every 100 females. By the time of birth the ratio of males to females has dropped to about 106:100 in the US (whites only) and in Britain to about 98:100. More males than females are miscarried or stillborn, and more males than females die of birth trauma; 54% more males than females die of birth injuries and 18% more of congenital malformations.

"In fact the life expectation of the female at birth is almost universally higher than that of the male. In Britain, life expectation at birth is 74.8 years for females, but 68.1 for males; in China it is 65.6 and 61.3 respectively; in Brazil, 45.5 and 41.8." ⁷

Ann Oakley provides ample data from research studies to show that men are much more susceptible to infectious diseases and mortality. According to her this susceptibility "has been directly connected with the difference in chromosomal make-up between male and female. Genes controlling the mechanisms by which the body withstands infection are transmitted via the X chromosome. . . the male's higher susceptibility has a distinct biochemical basis." ⁸

In South Asia however the biological superiority of women has been overshadowed by the social and cultural inferiority imposed on them and today, in almost every area, women lag behind men.

Aristotle called the male principle active, and the female, passive. For him a female was a "mutilated male", someone who does not have a soul. In his view the biological inferiority of a woman also makes her inferior in her capacities, her ability to reason and therefore to make decisions. Because the male is superior and the female inferior, men are born to rule and women born to be ruled Aristotle said "The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying." ⁹

Sigmund Freud stated that for women "anatomy is destiny". Freud's normal human was male, the female was a deviant human being, lacking a penis, and her entire psychology supposedly centred around the struggle to compensate for this deficiency.

And here's what Mr. Darwin had to say about women:

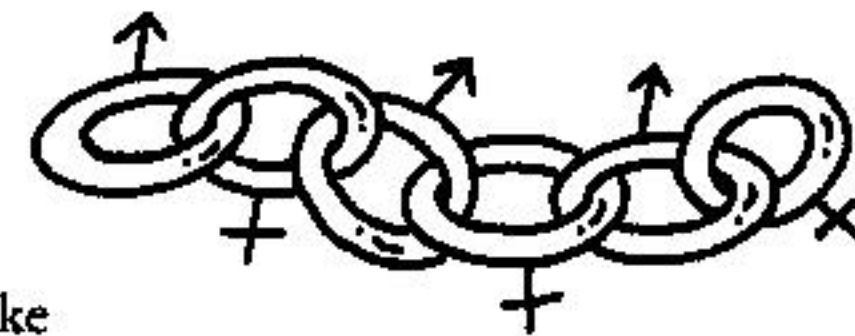
"Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and

less selfishness. . . It is generally admitted that with women the powers of intuition, or rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in men; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation." ¹⁰

Are you saying that biological differences between women and men are of no consequence at all? That the fact that women produce children has nothing to do with the roles they are assigned in society?

We are not denying that there are some biological differences between males and females, but the fact that gender roles vary so much between cultures shows that they cannot be based on or explained away by sex alone. We should remember a simple rule of science — **variables (gender roles) cannot be explained by constants (genitalia and chromosomes or sex)**. If biology alone determined our roles, every woman in the world should be cooking, washing and sewing but this is clearly not the case because most professional cooks, launderers and tailors are men.

What we are saying is that neither sex nor nature is responsible for the unjustifiable inequalities that exist between women and men. Like



the inequalities between castes, classes and races, these too are man made; they are historical constructs and therefore they can be questioned, challenged and changed. A woman may well have children but that should be no reason for her inferiority and subordination; nor should it determine her education, training or job opportunities. Why should having different bodies and different functions lead to inequality? You do not have to be the same to be equal, to have equal rights and opportunities.

Maria Mies, a feminist activist and scholar writes in The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour

*"... male-ness and female-ness are not biological givens, but rather the result of a long historical process. In each historic epoch male-ness and female-ness are differently defined, the definition depending on the principal mode of production in those epochs. . . Therefore, men women develop a qualitatively different relationship to their own bodies. Thus in matristic societies, female-ness was interpreted as the social paradigm of all productivity, as the main active principle in the production of life. All women were defined as 'mothers'. But 'mothers' then had a different meaning. Under capitalist conditions all women are socially defined as housewives (all men as breadwinners), and motherhood has become part and parcel of this housewife-syndrome. The distinction between the earlier, matristic definition of female-ness and the modern one is that the latter has been emptied of all active, creative, productive (i.e. human) qualities."*¹¹

If this is so can you tell us how society turns males and females into masculine and feminine beings ?

This happens through a **process of socialisation or gendering**; an on-going process within families and society.

All of us know that a new-born baby is not only immediately classified by sex, it is also assigned a gender. We have already seen how in some cultures even the welcome given to a new-born child is different. This is followed by the difference with which they are addressed, handled, treated and clothed and, through this regulation, taught how they should behave to be part of the society they

are born into. This is called **socialisation**. The specific process of socialisation which teaches children their gender roles is also called **gendering** or **gender indoctrination**. Different social mechanisms teach children masculinity and femininity of personality and make them **internalise** behaviour, attitudes and roles.

According to Ruth Hartley, socialisation takes place through four processes, namely, manipulation, canalisation, verbal appellation and activity exposure, explained below. All four processes are normally differentiated by sex and all are features of the child's socialisation from birth on.¹²

By manipulation or moulding is meant the way you handle a child. It has been noted that boys are treated as strong, autonomous beings right from the beginning. In some cultures mothers fuss with the baby girl's hair, dress her in a feminine fashion and tell her how pretty she is. These physical experiences of early childhood are very important in shaping the self-perception of girls and boys.

The second process, **canalisation** involves directing the attention of male and female children to objects or aspects of objects. Examples of this are giving girls dolls or pots and pans to play with, and encouraging boys to play with guns, cars and

aircraft. In working class homes in South Asia girls don't play with pots and pans, they are made to start cleaning real pots and pans, and real homes, looking after real babies while they are still very young; whereas boys are sent to school or made to work outside the home. Through this kind of differential treatment the interests of girls and boys are channelled differently and they develop different capabilities, attitudes, aspirations and dreams. Familiarity with certain objects directs their choices.



Verbal appellations are also different for boys and girls. For example, we often say, "Oh, how pretty you look" to girls and to a boy, "You are looking big and strong." Research studies show that such remarks construct the self-identity of girls and boys, men and women. Children learn to think of themselves as male or female and so to identify with other males or females. Family members constantly transmit aspects of gender role directly in the way they talk even to very young children, and they also convey the importance given to each child.

The last process is that of **activity exposure**. Both male and female children are exposed to traditional masculine and feminine activities from their very childhood. Girls are asked to help their mothers with household chores, boys to accompany their fathers outside. In communities where the sexes are segregated, girls and boys live in two distinct spaces and are exposed to very different activities. It is through these processes that children imbibe the meaning of masculine and feminine, and internalise them almost unconsciously.

If this process of socialisation is an on-going one then why is it that the debate between "nature" or "nurture" still continues? Isn't it obvious that upbringing is responsible for differences between girls and boys?

The amazing thing is that many of us are not always aware of what we are doing to our children. In fact we may believe we treat girls and boys differently because they are actually different. We may not accept that our daughters and sons develop differently because of the way schools, communities and we ourselves treat them.

Children also learn these roles without



being aware of the fact that they are being moulded. If there were no differences between girls and boys, and **all** girls and **all** boys everywhere behaved more or less in the same way, one could argue that gender roles are based on sex, but as we have seen that is not the case.

Sanctions or disapproval against children and adults when they deviate from their gender roles is another very powerful way of making everyone conform to expected male-female behaviour. The most common form of sanction is **social ridicule**.

The worst case I have come across of a backlash against women who dared to deviate, is from in a village in Kerala. Three young women workers saw their male colleagues go into a local pub every day. One day they decided to do the same just for fun. That led to all kinds of men following them and approaching them for sexual favours. Because they had dared to walk into a place where "good" women do not enter, they were defined as "bad". The logic was "If you can walk into a pub, you should be available for sexual pleasure too." Not being able to deal with the social ridicule and harassment that followed two of the girls committed suicide.

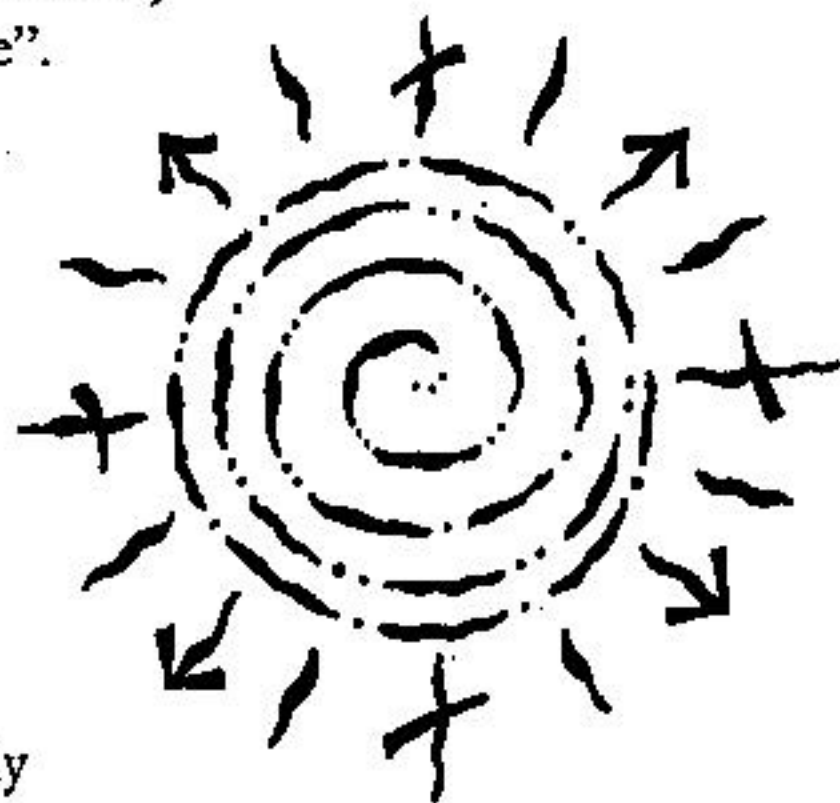
In addition to social sanctions there are also "economic sanctions" and, according to Ann Oakley, the severe problems confronting single women with children, and their economic difficulties are an index of society's disapproval of them. Often, families threaten or refuse to financially support children who deviate from set norms and practices.

Can you elaborate on this business of labelling certain characteristics and qualities as masculine, and others as feminine?

Certain dualities have come to be defined as male or female when they need not necessarily be either. For example:

Body	Mind
Nature	Culture
Emotion	Reason
Object	Subject
Private	Public

With those on the left being "female", and the ones on the right, "male".



Not only have the two been ranged as polar opposite, a hierarchy has been created between them. Mind is supposed to be superior to body, and culture an improvement on and superior to nature. Those who are rational and objective are valued more highly than those who are subjective and emotional. Women are the bodies, almost like nature (they breed like animals); men are the minds, thinking, rational, acting beings who work on nature and transform "it" into culture. Men are therefore superior, over and above nature, they can do with nature what they please.

Not only do women belong to the left side of the above-mentioned dualities, the indigenous and poor are also categorised as such. This is why tribals, forest-dwellers, small peasants and fisherfolk can, like women, be treated with disregard by development planners. Their forests can be cut and lands taken over without their knowledge or consent. This is how millions of them become "development refugees" and end up in horrible slums in urban centres to eke out a living in the most dehumanising conditions.

At the global level, the third world or the South is considered Body, the first world, the Mind; third world is Nature, first world Culture;

third world is emotional and irrational and first world rational, scientific, modern.

It is important to understand these connections between gender and other hierarchies of class, caste, race, first world and third world, etc.

"Three hundred years of witch-hunting, running parallel with the colonisation of the world, were necessary to snatch from the women—as from Third World people—their power, their economy and their knowledge, and to socialise them into becoming what they are today: housewives and the 'underdeveloped'. The housewife—and with her the 'underdeveloped'—is the artificial product, resulting from unimaginably violent development, upon which our whole economy, law, state, science, art and politics, the family, private property and all modern institutions have been built. The Third World is the 'witch' of witch-hunting days and is the 'general-housewife', the 'world housewife' today including Third World men. The relation between husband and wife is repeated in the relation between the First and the Third World." Claudia von Werlhof¹³

Not just qualities and characteristics, but even spaces are gendered. A pub, football stadium, street corner, tea-shop, paan shop, cinema hall can all become male spaces. Women normally go into them accompanied by some men. If they cannot help going into them alone they are expected to leave as fast as possible, if they do not wish to get into trouble. Under no circumstances should they consider lingering around like the men.

Similarly the kitchen or public well is almost entirely a female space. I am at a loss to find a social space that is exclusive to women.

They have no space for entertainment or work which is theirs alone. In Dhaka some women have started a weekly “*adda*” — a term generally used for a gathering of men where they chat, eat, drink, and enjoy themselves. Many men and some women objected to the use of the word “*adda*” by women because the very concept of “*adda*” was male — not “respectable” enough for women. Words and activities which are fine for “respectable” men are not considered good enough for “respectable” women. This is patriarchal logic.

Even within the home, a quiet room or space might be reserved for the man so that he is not disturbed by the rest of the household. It has been pointed out to me in workshops that household resources or items too, may be gendered. For example the larger glass, chair, or bed are reserved for the (male) head of the household. In working class homes the bicycle, radio, wrist-watch are all for men.

Isn't language also gendered ?

Indeed it is. Language is patriarchal and therefore carries and reflects gender biases and inequalities. Often men have a vocabulary of their own which women seldom use. The most obvious example of this is words of abuse with sexual connotations, commonly used by men. Although men use them without any hesitation, they are horrified if any woman does.

Our languages are also replete with proverbs and sayings which show women to be inferior to men; refer to them as being sinful, mean and quarrelsome. There is an oft-repeated couplet in Hindi which says a drum, an uneducated or low caste person and women, all deserve to be beaten. “A woman's heaven is in her husband's feet” is a proverb repeated all the time by some maulvis. In Bangla there is a saying, “Unlucky is the man whose cow dies. Lucky is the man whose wife dies.”

Then there is the use of the masculine as the standard, the norm. ‘Mankind’, ‘he’ and ‘his’ are used even when the reference is to women. Words like chairman, newsman, sportsman, one-man-show and hundreds of others are commonly used for women in these roles — although this practice is now changing.

The language of social sciences, philosophy and other disciplines also continues to be patriarchal and ignores, marginalises or misrepresents women. The mode in which abstract thought is cast and the language in which it is expressed are so defined as to perpetuate women's marginality. We women have had to express ourselves through patriarchal thought as reflected in the very language we have had to use. It is a language in which we are submitted under the male pronoun and in which the generic term for “human” is “male”. Women have had to use “dirty words” or “hidden words” to describe our own body experiences. The vilest insults in every language refer to parts of the female body or to female sexuality.” Gerda Lerner¹⁴

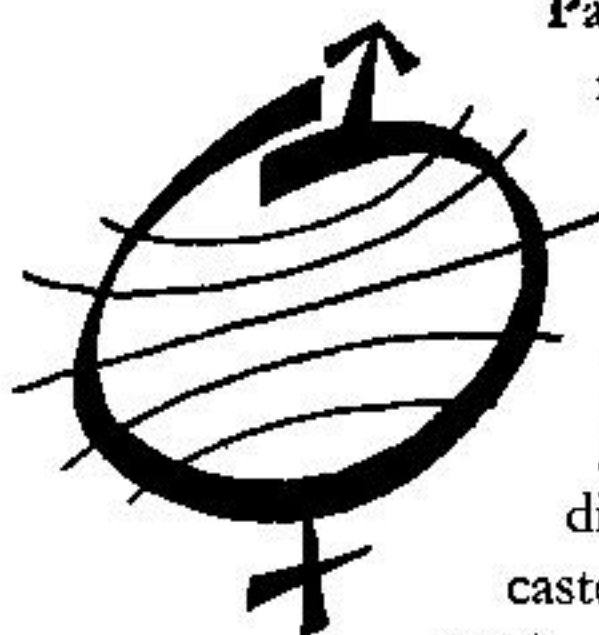
Another point worth mentioning here is that certain terms and roles in our languages are **gender ascriptive** (where gender is built in) like uncle-aunt, brother-sister, mother-father because they indicate the gender or sex of the person. But there are a host of others which are not gender ascriptive but it is assumed that they refer to a man or a woman. For example, secretary, nurse, kindergarten teacher are assumed to refer to women whereas boss, pilot, manager, politician, surgeon, or farmer refer to men. These assumptions only prove that public spaces and jobs continue to be dominated by men. Women are few and far between, especially in decision-making and managerial positions.



You have used the word patriarchy so often and have implied that patriarchy is the cause of gender inequalities and the subordination of women. Can you explain this term?

It is important to understand patriarchy in order to understand present-day relations between women and men. Gender relations are skewed because of the existence of patriarchy. In common parlance patriarchy means male domination; the word "patriarchy" literally means the rule of the father or the "patriarch", and was used originally to describe a specific type of "male dominated family"—the large household of the patriarch which included women, younger men, children, slaves and domestic servants, all under the rule of this dominant male. Now it is used more generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. In South Asia, for example it is called *pitrsatta* in Hindi, *pidarshahi* in Urdu and *pitritontro* in Bangla.

The subordination that women experience daily, regardless of the class we might belong to, takes various forms—discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence — within the family, at the place of work, and in society. The details may be different but the theme is the same.



Patriarchy is not the same everywhere. Its nature can be and is different in different classes in the same society; in different societies and in different periods in history. For example the experience of patriarchy was not the same in our grandmother's time as it is today; it is different for tribal women and for upper caste Hindu women; for the women in the USA and women in India. Each social system or

historical period throws up its own variations on how patriarchy functions and how social and cultural practices differ. The broad principles, however, remain the same i.e., men control most economic resources and all social, economic and political institutions.

Patriarchy is both a social structure and an ideology or a belief system according to which men are superior. Religions have played an important role in creating and perpetuating patriarchal ideology. They have spread notions of male superiority through stories like, Eve was created from Adam's rib; or man is created in the image of God, etc. Today, media and even educational institutions spread patriarchal ideology by showing men to be stronger in decision-making positions, and women as voracious consumers, dependent and jealous. Ideology plays an important role in perpetuating social systems and controlling people's minds. For example, by reducing women to bodies and objectifying them, media encourage violence against women. Ideology provides the justification for social behaviour and socio-economic structures.

Normally the following areas of women's lives and societies can be said to be under patriarchal control.

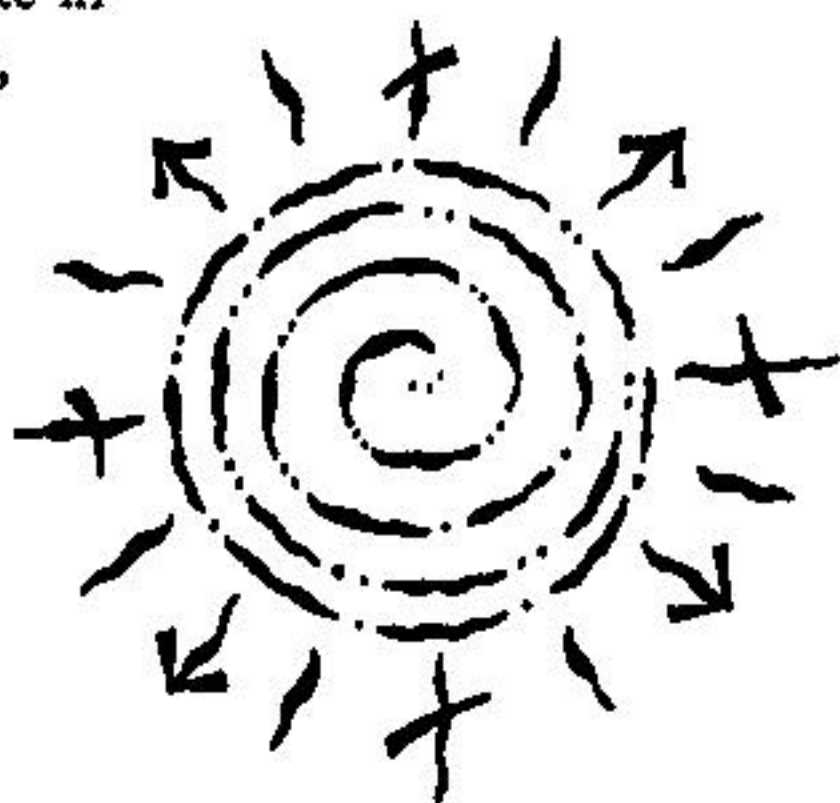
- Women's productive or labour power
- Women's reproduction
- Women's sexuality
- Women's mobility
- Property and other economic resources
- Social, cultural and political institutions¹⁵

An analysis of the main institutions in society—the family, religion, law, political, educational and economic institutions, media, knowledge systems—demonstrates quite clearly that they are all patriarchal in nature, and are the pillars of a patriarchal structure. This well-knit and deep-rooted system makes patriarchy seem invincible; it also makes it seem natural.

Under patriarchy different kinds of violence may be used to control and subjugate women and such violence may even be considered legitimate. In fact, feminists believe that violence against women is not just pervasive, it is systemic in patriarchies.

All this does NOT imply that women are totally powerless or without rights, influence and resources under patriarchy. In fact, no unequal system can continue without the participation of the oppressed, some of whom derive some benefits from it. This is true of patriarchies as well. Women have risen to power, have occasionally been in control, have wrested benefits in greater or smaller measure. But all this does not change the fact that the system is male-dominated — women are merely accommodated in it in a variety of ways. To give a parallel example, in a capitalist economy workers play a very important role, they may even participate in

management to some extent, but this does not mean they are ever in control. For a variety of complex reasons women also support and perpetuate patriarchy. Most of us have internalised its values and are not always free of patriarchal ideology.



In order to retain their privilege women continually renegotiate their bargaining power, so to speak, sometimes at the cost of other women. But it is important that we look at the overall system and analyze the reasons for this complicity. It is true that women often treat their sons better, deprive their daughters of education, restrict their freedom, mistreat daughters-in-law and so on. All this needs to be understood in the context of the respective power and position that men and women have in the family and in society. A rural

woman explained this very well. She said "Men in our families are like the sun, they have a light of their own (they own resources, are mobile, have the freedom to take decisions, etc.) Women are like satellites, without any light of their own. They shine only if and when the sun's light touches them. This is why women have to constantly compete with each other for a bigger share of sunlight, because without this light there is no life."

The appropriate way to describe male control over women is **paternalistic dominance**. There is dominance but it is paternalistic because women are provided shelter, food and security vis-à-vis outsiders. Paternalistic dominance has oppressive aspects, but it also involves a set of mutual obligations and is frequently not perceived as oppressive. This is what makes it difficult to recognize and fight.

How liberating was national liberation?

Although national liberation movements ended the political control by colonial powers and introduced the principle of separation of legislative from judicial and punitive powers, women were not liberated from the rule of husbands, or fathers, in the household. Within the home men still retain consolidated and arbitrary powers to determine the rules, judge the performance, and punish their wives and children. Thus men have the capacity to :

- *demand sexual relations at any time;*
- *prevent their wives from practicing contraception;*
- *determine how wives and daughters could and should spend their time in domestic work, in education, leisure or cultural activities, and determine the terms on which they enter the public space for employment;*

- *exert punitive or corrective violence against women when they judge the rules infringed, and not be subject to legal retribution for this;*
- *use and dispose of wives' earned or inherited property; and*
- *buy and sell wives/daughters, or dispose of them to meet debts or to compensate for insult by other males.*

Many of these presumptions and behaviours are translated into relations with women in the outside community, the workplace and political spaces. ¹⁶

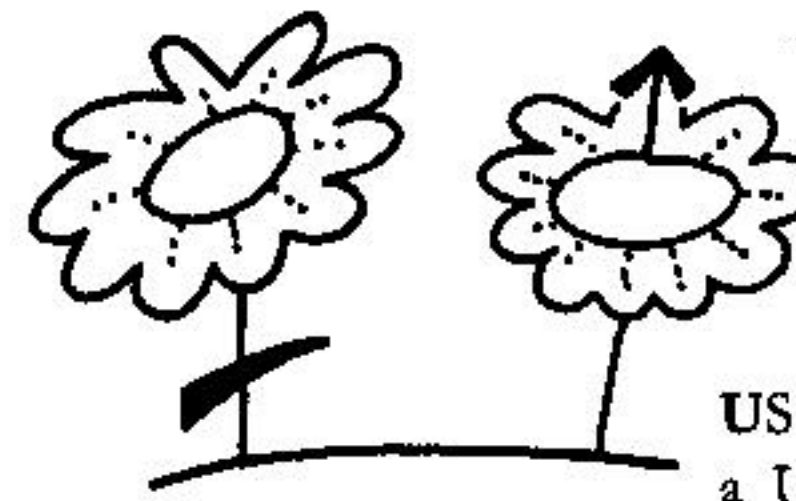
Don't education and overall modernisation or development bring in equality between men and women?

Not necessarily. Very often education itself is patriarchal, it justifies, perpetuates or ignores inequalities between women and men. Any number of analyses of textbooks and children's literature have shown the gender bias in them, in favour of men. This bias continues in almost all academic disciplines and is one of the main battles being fought by the women's movement and women's studies practitioners, everywhere.

HISTORY IS HIS STORY.

**To get a complete picture of the world
we also need HER STORY**

Even a cursory examination of societies like the UK and the USA which have had universal education for a long time and are supposed to be modern, industrialised and egalitarian, show that gender inequalities persist in them. Men are still considered heads of households in spite of the fact that both countries have large numbers of female-headed households. Over 50 per cent women in these societies experience physical violence at the hands of their husbands, and there is a high incidence of rape and physical



violence. Within the US, the Equal Remunerations Act has still to be passed, and abortion is a criminal offence in many states.

US Census Bureau figures show that a US working woman, just out of college, earns 75 per cent of the salary offered to the men she studied with — and the older she gets, the further behind she finds herself. An Associated Press analysis of census statistics released in 1991 found that at every educational level, women earned less than men with the same amount of schooling.

Ann Oakley provides statistics to show that in all industrialised countries there is a marked differentiation by gender in most, if not all, occupations. One occupation in particular, that of a housewife, is exclusively feminine. She further states that within industry there is a great deal of differentiation by sex. Most women, usually between a third and two-thirds of all working women, are concentrated in textile and clothing manufacture, and in food processing.

On the whole males command the majority of jobs with high prestige, high skill and high income, and this is true throughout the industrialised world. Of all managers of large establishments tabulated for Britain in 1966, 87 per cent were men and 13 per cent women. Women make up three per cent of all barristers in the USA, four per cent in Great Britain and seven per cent in Sweden. A mere 0.06 per cent of all engineers are female in Britain, 0.07 per cent in the USA and 3.7 per cent in France. While women in the professions receive the same rates of pay as men, in other jobs they do not: thus skill, prestige, financial reward and gender are interrelated in a complex but consistent fashion. ¹⁷

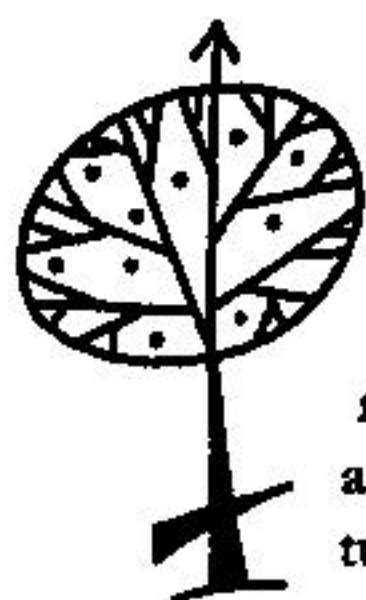
Vast differences persist in higher education, too. According to Ann Oakley, "It is at the highest levels of education that the disparity

is most marked. For every hundred people aged 20 to 24 in higher education in 1965, there were 6.6 females in the UK, 5.3 in Denmark, 2.3 in Switzerland and 15.2 in Bulgaria. While women made up about two-fifths of the intake of university students in Britain in 1967, women take less than a third of all final degrees and only about one-ninth of all higher degrees." These facts clearly reflect the situation in so called advanced nations that education is more important for a boy than it is for a girl. The subjects girls and boys study also reflect this disparity. In the United States in 1964, 46 per cent of masters' degrees in education were gained by women but only 10 per cent of these in science. Of all those studying medicine, dentistry and health in Britain in 1967, two-thirds were men.¹⁸

These statistics from industrialised countries, capitalist or socialist, indicate that gender hierarchies cannot be removed by education or development alone, if no serious attempts are made to change patriarchal structures and attitudes.

If gender determines the status and role of women and men, doesn't it also determine relationships between men and women ?

Indeed it does. If you assign different values to gold and silver you automatically determine the relationship between the two; so too, does society determine the relations between men and women. Relations based on gender are called gender relations. "The term gender relations refers to the relations of power between women and men which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas, representations, including the division of labour, roles, and resources between women and men, and the ascribing to them of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavioural



patterns and so on. Gender relations are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies in interaction with other structures of social hierarchy such as class, caste, and race. They may be seen as largely socially constructed (rather than biologically determined), and as variable over time and place."¹⁹

Like gender, gender relations are not the same in every society, nor historically static. They are dynamic, and change over time. However, one can generalise and say that in most societies gender relations are not equitable.

This understanding challenges the assumption that, within households, relations between women and men are harmonious and without conflict. In fact, there is both co-operation and conflict, harmony and disharmony. In other words, there is politics in gender relations. Here the term "politics" refers to the fact of power play in any relationship. Because people are assigned differing amounts of power, authority and control (over other people, resources, decision-making), subtle or blatant power games or politics taking place between genders within the family, at the work-place and in society at large just as they do between castes, classes and races.

Theoretically gender hierarchy can mean the domination of either gender, but in practice it almost always means a hierarchy in which men dominate and women are dominated. A common aspect of gender relations across cultures and throughout recent history is the subordination of women to men. Gender relations therefore are relations of dominance and subordination with elements of co-operation, force and violence sustaining them. This is so because most societies are patriarchal or male dominated. One can also say, that in most societies, gender relations are patriarchal in nature, they follow the rules of patriarchy — an ideology and social system whereby men are considered superior to women, are dominant and control most resources and social institutions.

Not only does gender determine relations between women and men, it may also influence relations between men, and between women. In South Asia where gender hierarchies are particularly uneven, gender is a very strong organising factor. In North India for example, the social relations between the bridegroom's father and the bride's father are illustrative, with the former generally considered superior and worthy of greater respect. The bride's father is always considered to be in a lower, subservient position merely because he is the father of a girl.

Examples of gender often determining relations between two women are those between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (*saas-bahu*); between a woman and her brother's wife (*bhabhi*) or husband's sister (*nanad*); or relations between the two mothers-in-law. In all these, the women who are connected to the bridegroom automatically occupy a superior status to those who are related to the bride.

Thomas von Aquinas, an otherwise intelligent and god-fearing Christian leader who lived in Germany some three hundred years ago, said women are like weeds, they grow so fast because they are of little worth. (Men of course are the main crop, the cash crop in today's world !)

*To be considered equal to men
women have to be twice as good as men.
.....Fortunately that's not difficult....*

What exactly do you mean by politics within the family and women's bargaining power being negotiated all the time ?

We have already seen that all members of a household do not have the same access to resources, services and

opportunities. Based on these inequalities, several social scientists see the family as a place of bargaining and contestation, where power is negotiated. The well-known economist, Amartya Sen, calls this a co-operation and conflict model. Bina Agarwal, a feminist economist, has developed this concept further, and according to her the household/family is a complex matrix of relationships in which there is ongoing negotiation, subject to constraints set by gender, age, type of relationship and "undisputed traditions". Gender interactions within the family as well as in the community, market and state contain elements of co-operation and conflict. Two parties agree to cooperate when such co-operation leaves them better off than non-co-operation.



Bina Agarwal maintains that a rural person's bargaining power will depend on his/her fall-back position, which in turn depends on five factors, in particular.

- private ownership and control over assets, especially arable land
- access to employment and other income-earning means
- access to communal resources such as village commons and forests
- access to traditional external social support systems
- access to support from the state or from NGOs

"These five factors impinge directly on a person's ability to fulfil subsistence needs outside the family. The premise here is that the greater a person's ability to physically survive outside the family, the greater would be her/his bargaining power (at least in relation to resource sharing for subsistence) within the family. Inequalities among family members in respect of these factors would place some members in a weaker bargaining position relative to theirs. Gender is one such basis of inequality, age another." ²⁰

To give just one example: women's income-earning capacity, when realised, places them in a stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis other members of the household, especially if their income is for the family's survival. Similarly, their access to or control over resources like land, money, or other assets reduces their dependent status, and enables them to negotiate a better status within the family.

How do our other identities like religion, caste and class affect gender and gender relations?

All of us have multiple identities. For example, in addition to being a woman, a person may be Hindu, middle class, upper or lower caste, married, etc. Gender interacts with the other identities, impacts and is impacted by social and economic factors, as well as by ethnicity, race, age and marital status. In society all women are not subordinate to all men. For instance, a rich woman because of her class affiliation, is in a position to dominate the men who work for her as domestic help. In this case a woman's class is more important than her gender. In other cases, a "lower" caste/class woman may be doubly exploited by an upper caste/class man. In some communities in India, for example, a lower caste bride is obliged to spend her first night as a married woman with the upper class landlord.



The existence of separate personal laws based on different religions also affects gender relations. Muslim Personal Law for example, allows polygamy and unilateral divorce for men; Christian Law does not recognise adultery by a man as cause for divorce; the Hindu Code does not allow adoption of children by parents of two different religions, and so on. And all religious laws favour men in matters relating to property rights and inheritance.

"Sexual exploitation mainly in the form of rape, is a means used by the ruling classes to discipline the

exploited classes. In order to punish rebellious poor peasants and landless labourers, landlords and police are not satisfied with beating up men and burning their huts; in many cases they also rape their women. Why? Obviously, these rapes are not, as is often believed, a kind of safety valve for the repressed sexual urges of the rapists. In fact, these acts have nothing to do with sexuality as such, neither are the targets the women as such, but rather the men of the poor classes. Women are seen as the only property that the pauperised men still possess. The rape of their women teaches poor men the lesson that their status is one of absolute powerlessness and propertylessness. This sexual aggression on the part of landlords and police against poor women is a weapon with which to beat the men of the propertyless classes and to stabilise the existing or newly emerging power relations in the countryside. Class rule and the oppression of women are here closely interwoven. He who owns the land owns the women of the land." Maria Mies²¹

Similarly there may be differences between people belonging to different races or ethnic groups. "Upper" caste women generally face more restrictions on their mobility than "lower" caste women because they have to preserve caste purity and superiority. Generally speaking, "upper" castes are much more male dominated or patriarchal because they are concerned about caste purity as well as patrimony or controlling property. This is why "upper" caste families impose restrictions of dress and mobility on their women, thereby controlling women's sexuality. Because "lower" castes have no purity to safeguard their women are not similarly restrained.

There is also a difference between the social, economic and political status of men and women belonging to different classes. Those of

the bourgeoisie or propertied classes have greater access to economic resources, education and information; they control social, economic and religious institutions in a way that people belonging to the working classes do not. There are differences between the roles, responsibilities and privileges of bourgeois women and working class women. Engels noted an important difference between bourgeois and working class women: the former in his analysis, does not work outside the family, she is totally dependent on her husband, she is property herself. Her only function is to produce heirs. The working class woman, on the other hand, has already broken her oppression by being a worker and hence attaining some economic independence.

Working class women also do not observe purdah or sex segregation, because they are obliged to enter public spaces to make a living. It has been observed that small farming households discourage their women from working outside the home when their economic condition improves. Women who remain within the household, being dependent, or in seclusion are considered a symbol of social status in many patriarchal societies.

Can you explain what is meant by the term “gender division of labour”?

Gender division of labour or sexual division of labour, refers to the allocation of different roles, responsibilities, and tasks to women and men based on societal ideas of what men and women should do and are capable of doing. Different tasks and responsibilities are assigned to girls and boys, women and men according to their sex-gender roles, and not necessarily according to their individual preferences or capabilities. All work/activities can be divided into three categories—productive, reproductive and community work/activities. Let us examine each of these for a “gender division of labour”.

PRODUCTION refers to that activity which produces goods and services for consumption and trade. All work done in factories, offices and farms, falls into this category, and it is only these activities that are counted as economic and included in the Gross National Product of countries. Although both women and men are involved in productive activities the gender division of labour prevails. Men do jobs which are more skilled and better paid. Often women's productive activities are an extension of the work they do at home. In the agricultural sector, women's productive work is not reflected in economic accounting because it is considered an extension of their household work. Women's productive activities are given less importance and less value. Women are the last to be hired because of the patriarchal notion that men are the main breadwinners and are heads of households. Therefore, male employment is given greater emphasis and priority.



REPRODUCTION is of two kinds — biological and social. Biological reproduction refers to giving birth to new human beings, an activity which only women can perform. Social reproduction refers to all the caring and nurturing activities necessary to ensure human survival and maintenance. Reproductive activities, thus, are those activities which reproduce human labour. Caring of children, cooking, feeding, washing, cleaning, nursing and other household activities fall in this category. Although they are necessary for human survival they are neither considered work, nor an economic activity and hence are invisible, unrecognised and unpaid. Reproductive work is carried out mainly by women and girls across the world.

COMMUNITY work refers to all those activities necessary to run and organize community life. Governance, the organisation of and participation in social and cultural festivals, social services and



facilities like roads, schools, health care, etc. are all community activities. Both men and women participate in these but, again, according to prescribed norms which define "male" activities and "female" activities.

Gender division of labour, therefore, operates not only in reproductive activities within the household but in productive and community activities as well, most of which take place outside the household. The gender division of labour is now considered a key concept to understand how gender inequalities or asymmetries are kept in place and reconstituted.

In time this division leads to a gender division of skills. Men and women, boys and girls learn and master only those skills considered appropriate to their gender roles. Thus, different skills and aptitudes are created in women and men, girls and boys, and are then ascribed solely to one or the other.

Gender division of labour also leads to hierarchies and inequalities because men and women's labour is not valued or rewarded equally. Even now, equal pay for equal work is not the norm in most countries; housework is unpaid; and women are the first to be fired when recession hits the workplace.

The allocation of certain tasks to men and women in productive processes (specially in household production) also leads to issues of command and control over resources and the products of labour. Thus, because of a gender division of labour, men assume control over land; technology; credit; cash from the sale of products, and so on. Normally, women produce for subsistence and men for exchange or cash.

Like gender and gender relations, the gender division of labour is also not the same everywhere. It is specific to culture, location and time. To challenge the gender division of labour in society means challenging what being a "man" or a "woman" in a society entails.

Women's productive and reproductive work is generally not assigned much economic value. According to the UNDP Human Development Report of 1995 the invisible and unpaid work contributed by women, annually, is worth US \$ 11 trillion.

"The husband has 'the queen of the commodities' i.e. money, in his pocket, but the wife is not paid for her work. The husband must give her only board and lodging, as he would also have to do for a slave. The housewife's working hours, conditions of work, holidays, leisure are not settled by contract; the marriage contract is not comparable to an employment contract. There is no right to strike, no sisterly organisation of housewives; they are instead, individualised and atomised. They enjoy no social security on the basis of their work as housewives, nor are they protected by law from the despotism and violence of their husbands. In the home nobody ensures the observance of human rights, hence they are a private affair, which allegedly do not concern the public even when there is no guarantee of physical safety.

The wife must serve, and above all, obey the husband; he can demand this in a court of law. In short the housewife is an unpaid worker, at the disposal of her husband, round the clock, all her life; even more, her whole person is at his disposal, including her sexuality and child-bearing capacity, her psyche and feelings. She is at the same time slave and serf who is compelled to do all the work that her husband and children need, including demonstrating love even when she does not feel any. Here one works out of love and love becomes work.

The situation may not always be intolerable, but it is impossible to predict that it will not become so.
Claudia von Werlhof²²

Irrespective of class or caste women do in the family what "shudras" or "menial" workers do in society. Within every household women are the "shudras" and men the "twice-born" or "upper castes". Women are the providers of services, even in bourgeois or upper caste households. Like the "shudras" therefore, women are considered "unclean", "impure", unfit for the superior pursuits of religion and spirituality, education, etc. Because menial jobs are not considered important or of much value, women's work is totally unpaid and unrecognised when performed at home, and underpaid when performed outside.

Women's work outside the home is often an extension of their work in the family. For example, a large number of women work as kindergarten and primary school teachers or nurses and airhostesses. Jobs which entail authority, power and control are considered men's jobs and jobs involving caring, nurturing, servicing are seen as women's jobs. **Women are subservient at home**, they continue to be subservient outside. **Men are in a position of power** and control at home, they continue to be in similar positions in the outside world. Men are better educated and better trained and they do not have to carry the double burden of work, so their professional graph rises much higher than that of women.

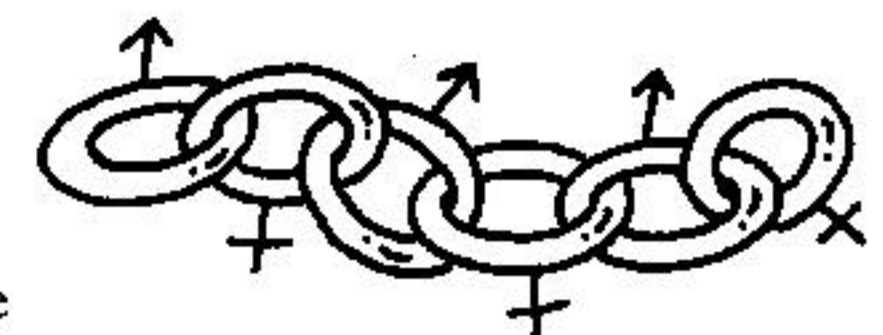
"Everything that women do must bear fruit and be gratis, like the air we breathe. This applies not only to producing and rearing children, but also to the sundry housework and wage labour, the emotional care bestowed on colleagues, the friendliness, submissiveness, being-always-at-others-disposal, healing-all-wounds, being sexually-usable, the-putting-everything-again-in-order, the sense of responsibil-

ity and self-sacrifice, frugality and unpretentiousness, the renunciation in favour of others, the putting-up-with and helping-out-in-all-matters, withdrawing-oneself and being-invisible and always-there, the passive being-available and the active 'pulling-the-cart-out-of-the-mud', the endurance and the discipline of a soldier. All this makes up the feminine work capacity." Claudia von Werlhof²³

"When the Taliban leadership takes over in Afghanistan, the first instruction they issue is that men should wear skull caps and grow beards while women should cover themselves and remain indoors. Women are prohibited from working or using public baths. It is interesting to see the connection between a new political regime and the gender regime that comes into force and the way a gender division of labour is reinforced. The sexual division of labour therefore is not a structure in its own right. It is part of a system of production, consumption and distribution, which is structured by gender." Vasanth Kannabiran²⁴

The gender division of labour is responsible for statistics like: globally, women hold only 14 per cent senior management positions (UNDP Human Development Report, 1995); the ratio between women's salaries and men's salaries in the US continues to be 3:5 and this has not changed in the last one hundred years. Seventy per cent of the world's poorest and illiterate people are women.

According to Maria Mies, we should no longer look at the sexual division of labor as a problem within the



family, but rather as a structural problem of society as a whole. The hierarchical division of labour between men and women and its dynamics form an integral part of dominant production relations, i.e., the class relations of a particular period and of society and the broader national and international division of labour.²⁵

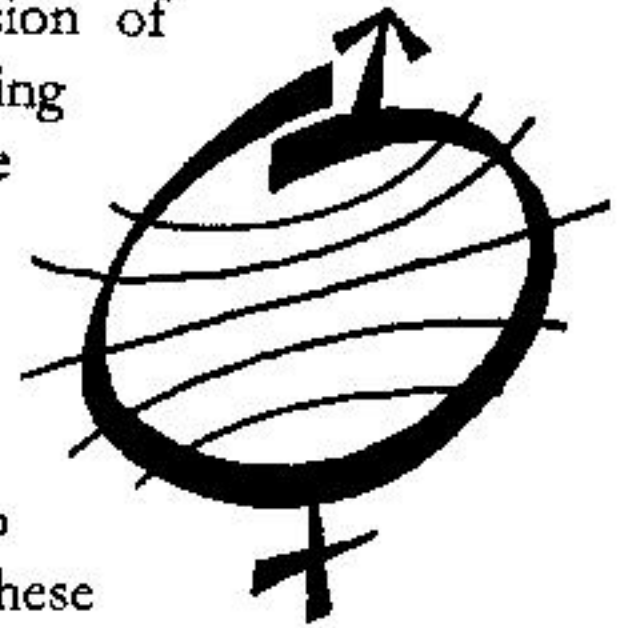
According to Joan Kelly, a feminist historian, we should look at property relations and women's relationship to work as the basic determinant of the sexual division of labour and sexual order. The more the domestic and public domains are differentiated, the more work and, hence, property are of two clearly distinguishable kinds. There is production for subsistence and production for exchange, and this is what influences the sexual division of labour.

But most people consider this gender division of labour natural. Because women give birth to children and breast-feed them, aren't they better equipped for caring and nurturing activities?

Your use of the term "better equipped" is interesting. Women are indeed equipped with a uterus and a pair of breasts but they have no extra equipment for caring, cleaning or looking after; therefore it is not "natural" for them to be looking after everyone. And, let us not forget that men manage to sweep and clean and wash and cook when these activities are paid for, so the reasons for doing or not doing reproductive work cannot be biological or natural.

But because people want to believe that present gender relations and the gender division of labour are "natural", based on women's biology, they find it difficult to think beyond bodies. It's also very convenient to reduce everything to nature because then you don't need to question or challenge patriarchal privilege. You wash your hands off all responsibility. So often in gender workshops we have observed that men get extremely upset, agitated and belligerent

when we demonstrate that gender is socially constructed, that gender relations and the gender division of labour are not natural. They had a beginning and therefore can have an end. The challenge of feminism and the political work of the women's movement is to work towards an end to inequality based on biological difference. It is possible now — though still not common — to find examples in many societies where these so-called "natural" differences and division of labour have been changed.



Could some of this division of labour be the result of social conditioning because women are confined to the household and men deal with the outside world?

This is an important but complex question, and it is not easy to provide a straightforward answer. First we need to understand the dichotomy between the private and public domains. Women are expected to remain in the private domain while men function in the public, while also controlling the private. Before the industrial revolution, however, this separation between the two was not so marked. Most production took place within the household and all members participated in it. Everyone was a "breadwinner". The household was the site of both reproduction and production. **There was co-operation and complementarity between men and women.** Women's skills, knowledge and their ability to reproduce the next generation were highly valued because they were indispensable for survival. In many ways this old order was **gynocentric** (woman-centred). Because of the important role women played in the household economy in colonial America the word "husband-woman" (the woman who managed, looked after, controlled or husbanded the affairs of the household) was commonly used.

The advent of the market economy and industrialisation dramatically upset the unity between private and public, the harmony between nature and human beings. Production was no longer a matter of subsistence alone — it was also intended for the market and for profit. Gradually production moved out of the household and into factories, commercial farms, and so on, and the market rather than nature became the controlling force in the lives of ordinary people.

The “economic man” moved out of the household and the “domestic woman” remained in it. Boys went to schools and universities to acquire knowledge and skills for operating in the outside world, while girls remained at home, acquiring skills for the “domestic” world.

“It was not only women’s productive skills which gave her importance in the old order. She knew the herbs that healed, the songs to soothe a feverish child, the precautions to be taken during pregnancy. If she was exceptionally skilled, she became a midwife, herbal healer, or ‘wise woman’ whose fame might spread from house to house and village to village. And all women were expected to have learned, from their mothers and grandmothers, the skills of raising children, healing common illnesses, nursing the sick.” Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English ²⁶

What happened in Europe as a result of marketisation and industrialisation has also happened in South Asia. Here too, production moved out of the household, as did education. Earlier most people picked up knowledge and acquired their production skills in the household, and girls and boys both got educated at home in skills and activities which were necessary for survival.



Among tribals, forest dwellers and peasants living in remote areas of South Asia, even now production takes place largely within the household. Their economy is still primarily a subsistence economy; surplus production is exchanged with items not produced by the household, in the local market. Women and men share householding activities and there is little or no distinction between the public and private spheres. Compared to other classes and communities there is not much inequality between men and women either. Slowly these communities are also getting “integrated” into the market economy and becoming more “patriarchal” than they used to be.

“Because of changes in the mode of production the home ceases to be viewed as a centre of economic production and comes to be seen rather as a refuge from economic production, ‘a haven from the heartless world’, a ‘utopian retreat from the city’. Reproduction remains in the family, production moves out. Household management loses its public character. It no longer concerns society. It becomes a private service and as Engels said, the wife becomes the head servant, excluded from participation in social production.” Alison M. Jaggar ²⁷

The distinction between the “public” and the “private” opens up new horizons and opportunities for men, but limits the place and functions of women. In a way, this is the end of the gynocentric order. Another consequence of the separation between the public and the private is the relative seclusion and isolation of women which follows. Women get excluded from society and separated from other women and men.

“The traditional productive skills of women — textile manufacture, garment manufacture, food

processing — passed into the factory system. Women of the working class might follow their old labour into the new industrial world, but they would no longer command the productive process. They would forget the old skills. In time, even the quintessentially feminine activity of healing would be transformed into a commodity and swept into the Market. The home-made herbal tonic is replaced by the chemical products of multinational drug firms; midwives are replaced by surgeons." Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English ²⁸

But has this separation between "public" and "private" sharpened the inequalities between men and women?

Yes it has. With the separation of the two, a hierarchy developed between them. The private or domestic sphere lost all economic, political and historical significance and became less and less important. That which does not enter the market is not considered "work", those who do not operate in it have no economic worth. Because women remained in the economically insignificant household, they lost their centrality, their value. Men's work became more important, the differences between women and men kept increasing, patriarchy became more powerful. From being gynocentric, households — and of course the public arena — became androcentric (male centred) and androcratic (male-ruled).



Gyne = Greek for woman

Andros = Greek for man

Gynecology = Science of psychological functions

and diseases of women

Gynocentric = Woman-centred

Androcentric = Man-centred

Gynarchy = government by females

Gynocracy = women's rule

Androcracy = men's rule

Gynelatory = worship of women

Gynocide = killing of women

Gynophobia = aversion to or fear of women

Androgyny = presence of male and female characteristics in the same person

The basic values which govern the domestic and public spheres have also been sharply divided; in fact one can almost say they are opposed to each other. While in the private sphere love, caring, selflessness, understanding are appreciated, the public sphere requires and valorises competition, ambition, aggression, individualism. Women are expected to provide a haven for men at home, away from the ruthlessness of the market place.

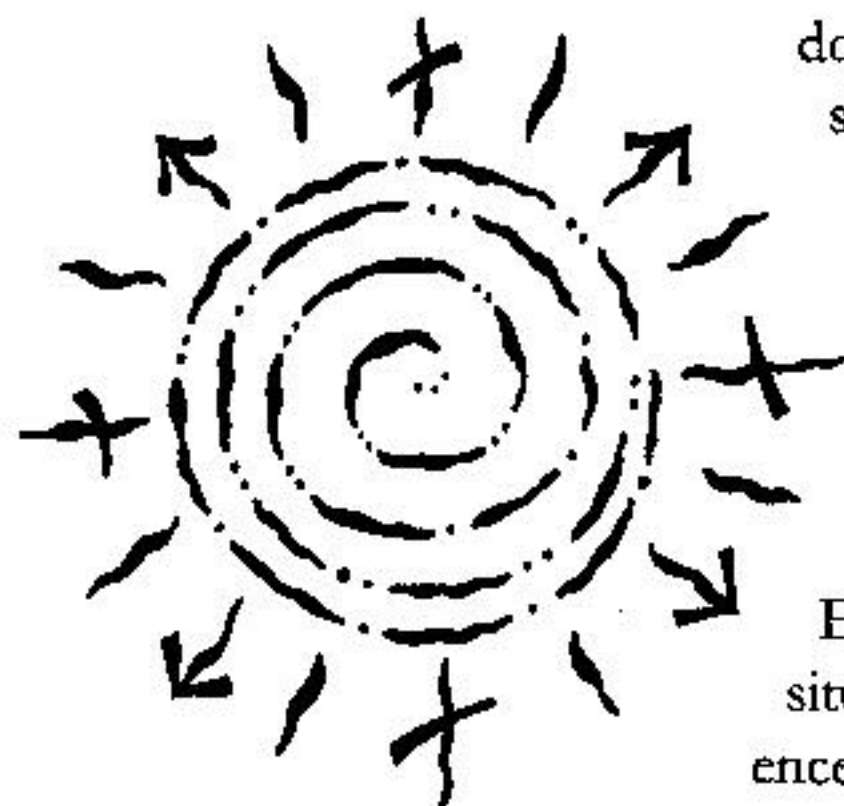
Religion-based morality and values do not anymore have a place in economics, science or technology. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English have described this rupture very well: "This new ordering of the world is not to be imagined as a mere compartmentalisation along some neutral dividing line. The two spheres stand, in respect to the basic values, opposed to each other, and the line between them is charged with moral tension. In its most fundamental operations the market defies centuries of religious morality which (in principle, at least) exalted altruism and selflessness while it condemned covetousness and greed. In the Old Order commerce was tainted with dishonour, and lending money at interest was denounced as usury. But the market which imbibed the new order dismisses all moral categories with cold indifference. Profits can only be won by some at the price of poverty for others, and there is no room for human affection, generosity, or loyalty..."

From what you have said so far it seems that the greater the separation between the private and public spheres, the lower the status of women. Is this true?

According to many feminist historians (and according to Engels), this seems to be the case. Women have a more equal status in societies where production takes place within the household and where there is little separation between the domestic and public spheres. But this private-public dichotomy is basically based on two different modes of production and economic systems in which women play very different roles. Therefore, in reality it is women's relationship to work and property which determines their status. Socialist feminists are of the opinion that women's secondary status in history can be traced to economics, inasmuch as women as a group have had a distinctive relation to production and property in almost all societies. The personal and psychological consequences of secondary status can be seen to flow from this special relationship to work.

According to Joan Kelly, "Although what constitutes 'domestic' and 'public' varies from culture to culture and lines of demarcation are differently drawn, a consistent pattern emerges when societies are placed on a scale where, at one end, familial and public activities

are fairly merged and, at the other, domestic and public activities are sharply differentiated. Where familial activities coincide with public or social ones, the status of women is comparable or even superior to that of men. This pattern is very much in agreement with Engels' ideas, because in such situations the means of subsistence and production are commonly



held and a communal household is the focal point of both domestic and social life. It is in societies where production for exchange is slight and where private property and class inequality are not developed that sex inequalities are least evident. Women continue to be active producers all the way up the scale but they steadily lose control over property, products and themselves, as surplus increases, private property develops and the communal household becomes a private economic unit, a family (extended or nuclear) represented by a man. The family itself, the sphere of women's activities, is in turn subordinated to a broader social and public order governed by a state — which tends to be the domain of men. This is the general pattern presented by historical or civilised societies." 29

Does this separation between private and public serve to conceal what happens inside the family, and make it difficult to challenge inequalities and conflicts within the household?

Definitely. In fact it has been argued by many political thinkers (and their followers) that the State should have no say in the "private" realm. The home and relations between family members, it is argued, should be exempt from government regulation. Everything that happens within the four walls of the house is considered a personal matter and no outside intervention is encouraged. Glaring inequalities and grave assaults on women are thus allowed to continue. Wife-battering, marital rape, rape of girls by fathers or other male relations, mental and physical torture of girls and women, and general deprivation experienced by girls have, till recently, remained invisible, undiscussed and unchallenged.

The divide between the domestic and public spheres also creates problems for women who take up jobs outside the home. These demand from them independence, mobility, competitiveness and long hours of work; the family demands the opposite —

subservience, service, co-operation. Scores of working women have talked about these almost irreconcilable demands and the physical and emotional tensions and stress they lead to. The role of a good wife and an effective boss are difficult to combine. No such demand is made on men, to combine the role of a good husband and an effective boss.

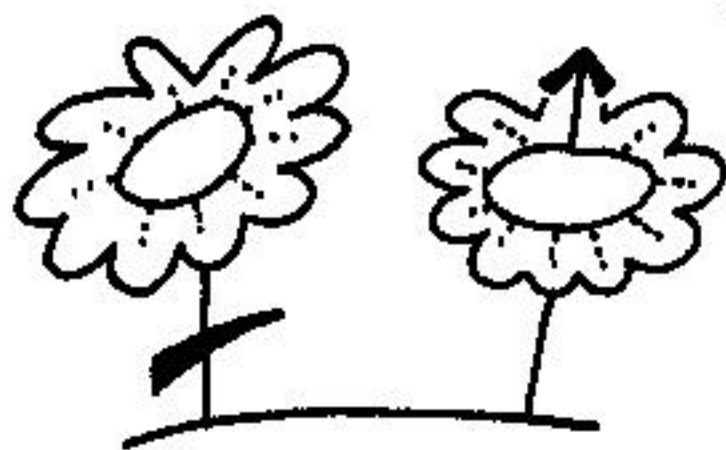
Feminists have critiqued and challenged this strict division of the private and the public, because they believe it encourages male dominance and increases inequalities. It is to challenge this duality that the feminist movement coined and popularised the slogan, "The personal is the political". It brought to the notice of the public the domestic sphere where women face different kinds of subjugation and oppression.

NO MORE SILENCE ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE !

Is there a difference between the different terms used for women's subordinate position — terms like oppression, exploitation, subordination ?

Although these terms are often used loosely and interchangeably, there are differences between them. But first I would like to point out that terms like gender oppression and gender subordination only state that there is oppression or subordination on the basis of gender. They do not specify which gender is oppressed or subordinated. Strictly speaking, gender oppression

does not only actually mean women's oppression; although, because women are generally the ones who are subordinate, it is assumed that gender oppression and gender subordination refers to them.



The term **exploitation** is now normally used in a Marxian sense, and it means economic exploitation or extraction of surplus. Women's exploitation thus means that they are made to provide economic services at low or no rates at all, and the exploiters derive economic or material benefits from this exploitative relationship. **Oppression** is commonly used for women's subordinate position, or their domination by men. In general the term refers to a historical and structurally institutionalised system of rights whereby one group benefits at the expense of another. The term implies forceful subordination and it has been used to describe the subject conditions of individuals and of groups as in "class oppression", "caste oppression" or "racial oppression".

Subordination means being placed below or ranked in an inferior position to someone else, or being subject to the control or authority of another. The term "women's" subordination refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision-making, etc., and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies.

Not all feminists find the term "oppression" appropriate. According to Gerda Lerner it "inadequately describes paternalistic dominance, which while it has oppressive aspects, also involves a set of mutual obligations and is frequently not perceived as oppressive. . .

"... The word 'oppression' focuses on a wrong; it is subjective in that it represents the consciousness of the subject group that they have been wronged. The word implies a power struggle, defeat resulting in the dominance of one group over the other. Women, more than any other group, have collaborated in their own subordination through their acceptance of the sex-gender system. They have internalised the values that subordinate them to such an extent that they voluntarily pass them on to their children. Some women have been 'oppressed' in one aspect of their lives by fathers or husbands, while they themselves have held power

over other women and men. Such complexities become invisible when the term 'oppression' is used to describe the condition of women as a group."³⁰

Lerner feels that the use of "subordination of women" has distinct advantages. "Subordination does not have the connotation of evil intent on the part of the dominant; it allows for the possibility of collusion between him and the subordinate. It includes the possibility of voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange for protection and privilege, a condition which characterises so much of the historical experience of women. I will use the term 'paternalistic dominance' for this relation. 'Subordination' encompasses other relations in addition to 'paternalistic dominance' and has the additional advantages over 'oppression' of being neutral as to the causes of subordination. The complex sex/gender relations of men and women over five millennia cannot be ascribed to a simple cause — the greed for power of men. It is therefore better to use fairly value-free terms in order to enable us to describe the various and varied sex/gender relations, which were constructed by both men and women in different times and different places."³¹

The term **deprivation** is sometimes used to express women's situation but it is inappropriate because it hides the existence of power relations. Deprivation is the observed absence of prerogatives and privileges. It focuses attention on that which is denied, not on those who do the denying. Deprivation can be caused by a single individual, groups of people, institutions, natural conditions and disasters, ill health and many other causes.

Since women's situation varies from society to society and at different times in history, one can use different terms to suit the situation one is describing.

Gender and Development

Why has gender become so important in development issues and debates?

Over the last 10-15 years gender and development has indeed been discussed a great deal. There have been scores of conferences, trainings and workshops on the subject. Women's, or gender, concerns were brought to bear on development issues when it started becoming clear that planned development efforts, which were meant to improve the lives of whole communities, were either not helping women, or were actually harming them in many ways. Around the end of the 1960s and early 1970s (mainly) women researchers in different parts of the world started pointing to the neglect of women in development planning. Similar things had been observed earlier about the lack of participation and further marginalisation of the poor in this process. Planners assumed that development programmes would automatically benefit all members of communities, but this assumption was found to be invalid almost everywhere. In the 1950s when the newly independent countries began planned development, their model was the west. It was thought that industrialisation and modern agriculture would usher in growth and development, and the focus was on industrialists, landowners, rich farmers and entrepreneurs. Governments of developing countries were "betting on the strong", assuming that the benefits of development would "trickle down" to the poor majorities, and gradually whole communities would prosper. Little attention was paid to the income-poor and to women. Women's contribution to the household and to the economy was neither recognised nor valued.

During the First United Nations' Decade, 1960-1970, it became clear that the benefits of development were not reaching the poor majority. There was evidence of underemployment, food shortages



and further polarisation between the rich and the poor. As a result of these findings and the pressure from below, the goals of development and the means for their achievement were re-examined during the Second Development Decade, 1970- 80. In countries like India and Bangladesh, NGOs working in rural areas pointed out the lack of participation by the poor and women in development programmes. This is when concepts like "people's participation", a "bottom-up approach", "redistribution with growth" and so on were debated, and the "basic-needs approach", accompanied by anti-poverty programmes, introduced.

In much the same way, it was discovered that even when a household benefits from development programmes, it does not follow that women in the household will benefit equally or benefit at all. Studies done from a feminist perspective — i.e., one which is guided by women's interests and concerns and aims to transform hierarchical gender relations and make them equal — in different parts of the world — provided data and evidence to show that gender-blind development plans had generally ignored women, their perspectives, needs and interests. This neglect meant that existing inequalities between women and men were not addressed, and second, women's action and potential contribution to and participation in the development process was ignored. Consequently, women were further marginalised and disempowered.

It was there for all to see that women were not given access to educational and training opportunities, technology did not liberate them from drudgery, and prejudice and misconceptions persisted.

Could you please give some examples to explain these points.

Almost everywhere in the world women have been farmers and producers of food. Despite this, our planners, decision-makers and communicators have persistently refused to recognise their contribution. The very language of these gentlemen (and

ladies) betrays their discriminatory perceptions. Thus while referring to farmers they invariably use masculine pronouns like "men" and "he".

Development programmes leading to marginalization of women

The result of these blinkers vis-à-vis women was, and still is, that in planning for agriculture and rural development, women have been neglected and further marginalised. Most training, information and credit for agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry have been given to male farmers, in spite of the major contribution of women to these activities. Extension programmes have been run almost exclusively by men, for men. By contrast income generating activities for women have remained conventional: sewing, embroidery, *papad* and pickle making, which have generated little income but many myths about what is feminine and masculine.

Agricultural development has normally and almost entirely been "manned" by men, right from decision-making to implementation. For example the massive and expensive Training and Visit projects for agriculture extension in India, planned and funded by the World Bank in the 1980s, totally ignored or bypassed women. Similarly, a report on media support for big reforestation programmes in Nepal did not mention women even once. Women have not even been involved in projects related to reforestation, water supply, grain storage or other activities which are managed primarily by, and are of critical concern to them.

What is more, we find that most technology has been given to and is controlled by men, while women continue to do the more tedious, repetitive and back-breaking tasks. Commercialisation of agriculture has led to greater control of cash and family resources by men, even when, often, women do the work.

In the Eighties a review of eleven major rural development projects in Nepal showed that the productive roles of women were completely ignored because of distorted concepts of "housewife",

“head of household”, and “economic” activity. In most of these projects, new farming technologies and machinery were made available only to men and applied only to male tasks, such as ploughing. When mechanisation was introduced for a female task such as husking or milling, it was transformed into men’s work. This happened with the introduction of mechanised milling for high yielding rice varieties in Indonesia and Bangladesh. As a result, in one stroke large numbers of women were deprived of whatever little they were earning earlier.

Women have also been excluded from owning or controlling land, the most crucial productive resource in agricultural economies. An FAO study has pointed out that traditional systems of land tenure often allowed women to grow food for themselves, their children and extended families, without recourse to formal land ownership. Some land reform programmes, however, have given titles to land to individual men with the result that women may no longer have access to or control over it. At the same time the new owner may decide to sell rather than cultivate the land, taking it out of use for producing food for local consumption.

Because land deeds are made out in the names of men they become the legal heads of household. As such it is only they who are entitled to receive loans, participate in government schemes, become members of co-operatives, etc. This is so even in places like the hills of UP in India where most agricultural work is done by women because of male migration to the cities. It is the same story when it comes to training.

An analysis of many irrigation resettlement schemes like the Mahaveli Scheme in Sri Lanka, the Muda Scheme in Malaysia, and the Mwea Scheme in Kenya shows that they were planned with a nuclear family (a male head and a female housewife-helper) in mind, ignoring existing customary practices which gave women relative autonomy as producers in these communities.



Feminist researchers have pointed out that in the Mahaveli Scheme in Sri Lanka married women were not entitled to plots of land, and because the family was asked to name only one heir, this was usually the son. Thus, contrary to Sinhala customary law and practice of bilateral inheritance whereby both sons and daughters have a right to the family paddy land, and where married women too have independent and unalienable land ownership rights, in the scheme villages, wives were considered to be dependants. Again, because they were not given land titles, women had little access to agricultural extension information, institutional credit and co-operative membership. Thus women were marginalised and disempowered in new ways.

Extension trainings too, it has been found, neglected women, and cultural attitudes further discourage contact between women and male extension agents. For example, in one area of north-west Bangladesh, women traditionally selected seeds for planting. When a new variety of high yielding wheat was introduced the results were disappointing; it was found that women were choosing wrong seeds because the extension programme had been directed only at men.

Thus the experience of different parts of the world shows that women have been pushed out of mainstream agriculture in the name of “development”. Earlier, men and women were equal partners in agriculture. Their knowledge, contribution, and participation in decision-making were more or less the same. Gradually, male farmers were singled out for attention by male “developers”; they got machines to lighten their burden and to increase efficiency; they were made members of co-operatives and development committees. Cash-crops delivered cash into the hands of men. Commercialisation of agriculture also marginalised women because markets, banks and trading centres are “public” spaces and thus beyond the reach of most women.

Other areas of economic activity provided similar insights. For example, in India it has been found that as a result of

mechanisation and modernisation women lost their jobs in the textile industry where they had been employed in large numbers. This economic marginalization has led to women's social marginalization and to a lowering of their status. This may be one reason why, for example, dowry, and female infanticide and foeticide in India have spread to areas and communities in which they did not exist earlier. This may also be one of the main reasons for the continuing decline in the female-male ratio in South Asia. Economic redundancy seems to have lowered the chances of women's survival.

How would you characterise such a development paradigm from a feminist perspective ?

Many socialist feminist researchers have gathered enough evidence to show that monetisation and the commercialisation of production have led to the marginalization of women and the poor. Capital accumulation makes it possible for some people to accumulate more and more even as others lose control over land and other resources. The only thing they control is their labour power, but the value of their labour is not determined by them. In fact, Engels has said quite categorically that it was private property that led to the creation of class and gender hierarchies. According to him the need to control women came along with the emergence of private property. Male control over women's reproduction and sexuality made for the world historic defeat of the mother right. Further, the position of bourgeois women is much worse than that of working class women because bourgeois women themselves are property, they are merely the carriers and producers of heirs.

Economists Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze came to similar conclusions from their research on Female Male Ratios (FMR) in India.³² They show, first, how since 1901 the FMR for the whole of India has been going down systematically. Second, they show

that generally figures are higher among poor, illiterate working classes and castes.

In 1901 lower caste chamars in UP had an FMR of 986 compared with 937 for the state population as a whole. By 1981 the FMR was more or less the same among Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other castes. This is because the SCs and STs of UP are today more like the 'higher' castes, which means they have also begun to practice the patriarchal neglect of women thereby reducing their chances of survival. In other words these figures prove that the patriarchal norms of higher castes are spreading to others.

This process, Sen and Drèze say, is particularly strong when the disadvantaged castes experience upward economic mobility. It is quite shocking and bewildering to be told by them, that higher levels of poverty tend to go with higher FMRs. It is in fact, plausible that the partnership aspect of gender relations is stronger in poorer households, where survival depends on effective co-operation, than among privileged households where women tend to have a more dependent and symbolic position.

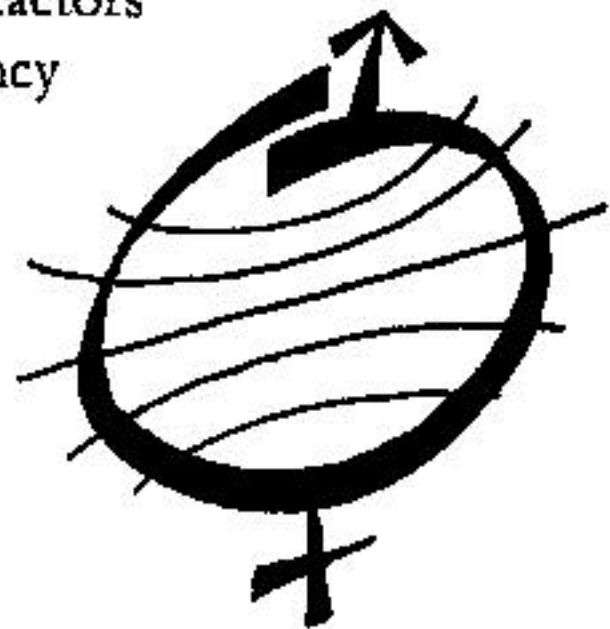
Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, a German feminist scholar presents a similar hypothesis. She writes that the appalling situation of the majority of Third World women is not a remnant of archaic systems of patriarchy, or a sign of backwardness and underdevelopment; on the contrary, it is a product of modern development. According to her, the housewife as we know her today, emerged in the First World during the 19th century. She is the result of a protracted historical process comparable with and closely related to that of proletarianization. Bennholdt-Thomsen terms this process 'domestication' or 'housewifisation' and she goes on to say that as soon as the modern money and commodity economy gains hold, women find themselves relegated to the unpaid or lowest paid spheres of work. In particular, women cease to be able to live autonomously with their children in a world which runs on the money to which they have such restricted access. Growing

propertylessness forces them to submit to dependence on men, and relations between men and women stop being co-operative. Based on these objective circumstances, they necessarily become hierarchical. She says since money and social esteem in modern society are closely related, those whose access to money is severely limited are also denied esteem.³³

Maria Mies, who studied rural women in India in the '70s, writes: "The most brutal forms of violence and of sexist terror are to be found in areas where agriculture has been rapidly 'developed' in recent years, where new forms of wealth appeared, where cinemas, alcohol, television and other new consumer goods were introduced as indicators of 'modernisation'."³⁴

These statistics and insights should make all those involved with "development" sit up and rethink. They remind us that economic progress by itself does not necessarily reduce gender inequalities. In fact, capitalist economic growth may actually lead to an intensification of gender bias. Punjab and Haryana, two of the most economically advanced states of India, with their FMRs of 882 and 865 respectively (as against the Indian average of 927), are good illustrations of this point.

Achieving greater gender equality involves a process of active social change which may have no obvious link with economic growth. A number of studies have shown that the extent of anti-female bias is substantially reduced by various factors that give women more voice and agency within the family. These are primarily education and the ability to earn an independent income through paid employment. The latter makes for women getting greater exposure, more respect, more bargaining power and better chances of survival.³⁵



Have these researches and insights made any difference to development planning and programmes?

Yes, they have. Some planners and decision-makers realised that ignoring or neglecting women was harming not just women but entire communities and nations, because women, after all are half the human race. To influence member governments the United Nations organised a major global conference on Women and Development in 1975 in Mexico, declared 1975-85 to be the Decade of Women, and formulated declarations and plans of action which were endorsed by many member governments. Literally hundreds of other conferences and meetings were organised in different parts of the world to discuss how to integrate women into development. So, on the one hand there was pressure from below — i.e., the demands of the women's movement for equality, justice and development — and on the other there was pressure from above — i.e., global declarations, UN charters, and so on. The result was that many governments set up women's ministries, departments or commissions with the task of generating data and qualitative information on women, to monitor and evaluate the impact of development programmes on them, and to integrate women's concerns in development planning. Women's contribution to production and to society in general and their specific needs were now recognised and discussed. To some extent, the purdah of neglect and disregard was lifted and women became somewhat visible. Many governments agreed to provide annual reports to the UN Commission on the Status of Women on progress made by them towards gender equality.

However, as Saskia Wieringa points out, "Despite the attention paid to issues of women and development in the last decades, actual progress has been uneven and piecemeal, both under conditions of economic decline and of economic growth." In a United Nations Report of 1991, the Secretary General at that time, Perez de Cueller, noted that "It is clear from these data and

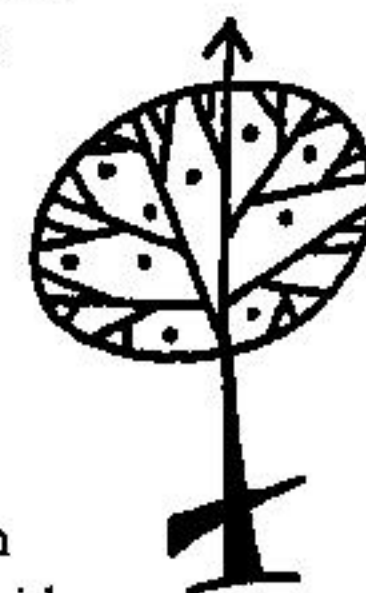
indicators that although there have been some improvements for women over the past twenty years, the majority still lag far behind men in power, wealth and opportunity. The HDR 1993 shows that women (the world's largest excluded group from development), are frequently shut out from positions of power, are much less likely to be literate than men, and have many fewer job opportunities: in the (developing) countries for which relevant data are available the female human development index is only 60 per cent that of males." Some recent work has also stressed the link between the gender gap in development and violence against women.³⁶

Have gender relations become more equal in South Asia ?

It is not easy to give a clear-cut answer to this question. The issue is complex and cannot be generalised for all societies or countries. In some ways women have definitely gained. Today they have more rights (right to vote or to inherit, for example); more opportunities (for education, training, jobs, travel); and more participation in political decision-making. There is also much greater awareness about women's oppression and the need to tackle it systematically. Women themselves are much more articulate and organised for change. But there are other ways in which women seem to be worse off.

In Sri Lanka, for instance, where the statistics for female life expectancy and literacy were quite impressive, the situation has deteriorated over the last 10-15 years. In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan the sex ratio continues to become more adverse for women. In 1901 the female-male ratio in undivided India was 975 women to 1000 men. In 1991 in Bangladesh it was 940, in India 927 and in Pakistan 910. Today 74 million women and girls are "missing" in South Asia. This means many more women and girls are being "killed" today than 90 years ago by patriarchal neglect, discrimination and violence. These figures prove that the situation of women and girls has been worsening in spite, or perhaps because

of, "development". In most of South Asia, while women are being provided with more opportunities, and there is more awareness and articulation of gender issues, we find a resurgence of patriarchies. Religious fanaticism of all kinds has meant more restrictions for women. In Pakistan, for example, progressive family laws have been replaced by the anti-women Hudood Ordinance; in Bangladesh, fundamentalists have been attacking emerging women's groups and NGOs working for the empowerment of women. Right-wing Hindu groups in India are busy reviving patriarchal role-models. Market fundamentalists are spreading pornography and demeaning images of women with incredible speed. Beauty contests, which had been discredited and more or less disappeared, are back with a vengeance along with globalisation and liberalisation. The incidence of violence against women has increased sharply. Economic hardships are leading to increasing discrimination against women. For example, in India, the practice of female infanticide has reached villages in South India where it had never existed; and dowry is being practised by communities which neither gave nor took dowry earlier. The figures with regard to women's participation in politics continue to be appalling, in spite of the fact that four of our seven South Asian countries have had women heads of state. No South Asian country has had more than a handful of women members of parliament since Independence.



Examining the changes in the patriarchal system in Britain, Sylvia Walby makes observations which seem to be applicable to South Asia as well. She says: "There have been changes both in the degree and form of patriarchy in Britain. It has seen a movement from a private to a public form of patriarchy over the last century. Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy expropriation of

women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs, in public patriarchy it is collective."

On the question of whether there has been progress or regress in women's position, she says, "Patriarchy is not a historical constant. Modifications in gender relations over the last century or so have been interpreted variously as progress, regress and involving no overall change. Liberals typically define them as progress; Marxists as regress followed by stasis, and radical feminists as embracing no significant change."³⁷

Earlier everyone talked of "women in development". How did this change to "gender and development"?

Initially most people talked about integrating women into development. This has been called the Women in Development (WID) approach, which aimed at meeting women's basic needs and making use of women's traditional skills and abilities for achieving the goals of development. However, it was found that WID policies and programmes did not address the subordination and oppression of women, nor did they question the anti-poor biases of development thinking and programmes.

It was in the '80s that the focus shifted from women to gender, and from welfare, basic needs and efficiency approaches to a women's empowerment approach, which seeks to address the patriarchal system at the root of women's subordination. It was

argued that looking only at women is neither problem-free nor adequate. Focusing on women made it appear as if women were the problem, as if something was wrong with them, and that if that something was corrected, things would improve. Later it was pointed out that to improve women's condition and status and to make them partners in development, it was essential to understand the



causes of women's subordination; to examine the social system (patriarchy) which keeps women oppressed and subordinate. The concept of gender emphasised that the problem was not with women but with the socio-cultural definition given to women and men, which determined their rights and responsibilities, their work and spaces and so on. Women are what they are because of a social system, and it is the social system and its definition which need to be changed to improve women's status. Looking at gender requires looking at men as well, because women cannot be understood in isolation. It requires an examination of how gender is constructed and perpetuated in different societies, it means looking at gender relations, the gender division of labour and gender hierarchies. And, importantly, it requires looking at and addressing power in gender relations.

"The increasing recognition that development is not gender-neutral was accompanied by a conceptual shift from 'women' to 'gender'. The concept of gender emerged as a way of distinguishing biological difference and socially constructed inequality, while the concept of gender relations sought to shift attention away from looking at women and men as isolated categories to looking at the social relationships through which they were mutually constituted as unequal social categories. Gender relations are an aspect of broader social relations and, like all social relations, are constituted through rules, norms and practices by which resources are allocated, tasks and responsibilities are assigned, value is given and power is mobilised. Gender relations take account of the central issues of power and hierarchy within the family and society." Madhu Sarin³⁸

Although not all "gender experts" do so, we believe the following points need to be stressed when talking of gender and development.

Differences between men and women's achievements and participation are a result of socially constructed gender roles rather than of biological difference.

What needs scrutiny and change is not just women but gender-relations and gender divisions of labour.

Changing the condition, position and roles of women requires a corresponding change in the condition, position and roles of men. The two are inter-connected and there is a relationship of power between them.

To change women's position it is necessary to challenge patriarchal structures and ideologies.

Because of gender-subordination women continue to require special attention.

Gender relations and hierarchies cannot be studied in isolation. They have to be understood in the context of caste, class and race and north-south relations.

It is now widely recognised that women must be empowered and that the systems and ideologies which keep them subordinate, dismantled. Women must be equal partners in decision-making in all institutions and at all levels, and they must be subjects, not objects, or just beneficiaries of development policies and programmes.

These changes in the thinking on women and development have been analysed, categorised and labelled (mainly) by women researchers and academics. Approaches followed during the last three decades have been labelled WID, WAD and GAD. These labels try to capture trends which were set in motion from the ground up by millions of women and men all over the world who were dissatisfied with the treatment meted out to the majority of the world's population, and to nature, by insensitive analysts,



planners and policy makers. For the majority, their concern is not more "progress" but survival. In the '80s and the '90s Structural Adjustment Programmes, globalization and privatisation have further squeezed the poor who have lost even the little control they had over the natural resources on which they subsisted. Instead of the majority controlling the natural wealth of the world a handful of companies, motivated purely by profit and power, control and exploit it. In most countries of the world the poor are worse off today than they were in the '60s. So much for "planned development".

During the last two decades 1.6 billion people living in about 100 countries have experienced a decline in their per capita income.

Growth can, and has become for many, jobless, voiceless, rootless and futureless. UNDP Human Development Report, 1996.

People's organisations and movements (like the women's, environment, human rights and NGO movements) have been questioning development thinking, challenging hierarchies of caste, class, race and gender, and they have been trying to create alternative thinking and practices. One of these has been to reconceptualise women in development. Maxine Molyneux, a feminist researcher, pointed out that after the revolution in Nicaragua, efforts were made to meet women's practical gender needs but their strategic interests were not addressed. Hence although the condition of women changed, their position vis-à-vis men did not. Similar insights from different parts of the world led to the formulation of useful concepts like **condition, position, practical gender needs, strategic gender interests, subordination, empowerment, autonomy**, and so on.

Condition of women is their material state in terms of their nutritional level, health, access to

basic needs, education, and this can be improved by providing food, health services, education, etc.

Position of women is their placement or status in society in relation to men. To assess the position we need to look at the social relations of gender or relations of power between women and men. To improve women's position the existing norms, structure and power relations between women and men have to be changed.

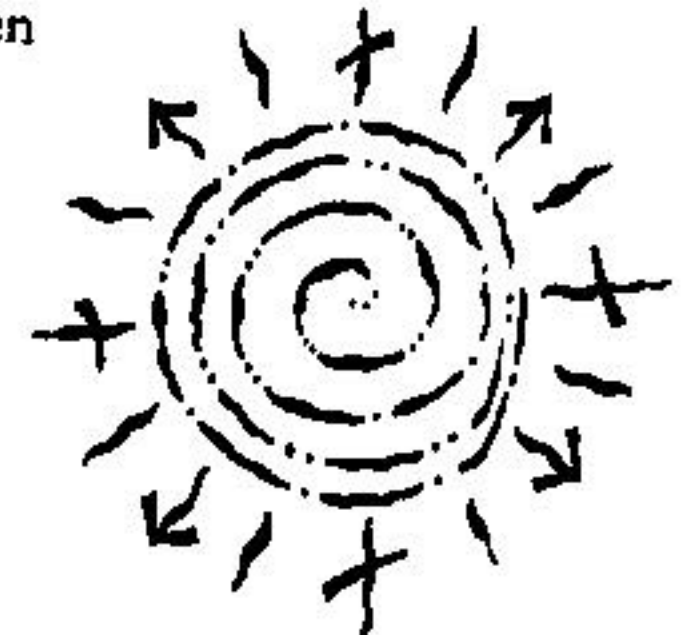
Practical Gender Needs (PGNs) are related to the condition of women. They are easily identifiable (food, clean water, medicines, housing) and they are related to the existing gender division of labour. For example women say they need water, fuel and fodder because it is they who look after their children, the household and domestic animals. Because fulfilling women's PGNs does not change the existing power relations no one feels threatened by activities and programmes aimed at meeting PGNs.

Strategic Gender Interests (SGIs) are related to women's subordinate position in society and their desire to change the existing hierarchical gender relations and make them more equal. SGIs can be pursued by women organising, getting into decision-making positions, changing discriminatory practices, norms and rules in order to transform gender relations. Activities which promote women's SGIs are education, consciousness-raising, mobilising and organizing, developing leadership and management skills, etc. Such activities are often resisted because they challenge male domination and demand long-term changes in gender relations. But these categories are often very fluid. The condition of women can be changed in such a way

that it leads to changes in their position and transforms gender relations.

Easier said than done! How do you actually change age-old ideas, attitudes and behaviour patterns? How do you redistribute power between women and men?

Indeed it is not easy to change all this, especially power relations. Organisations that are supposed to plan and bring about change are themselves very patriarchal, be they government departments or non-government organisations. Even women's organisations and women are not free of patriarchal thinking because they are products of the same culture. Massive changes are required in thinking, in organisational structures and policies, in planning and implementing development programmes, for real social change to take place.



Large numbers of women and men all over the world have made different kinds of efforts at different levels to change patriarchal thinking, attitudes, structures and organisations. To give just a few examples:

- School curricula have been analysed and made more gender sensitive.
- Patriarchal biases in media have been highlighted and laws, regulations and guidelines prepared to weed out sexism from media and make them reflect women's contribution, needs and aspirations.
- Laws have been scrutinised and made more gender sensitive.
- Women's studies centres have been instituted to prepare women

and men who can conduct gender sensitive research; to analyse social, economic and political issues from the perspective of women.

- Attempts have been made to make national censuses gender sensitive and obtain sex-differentiated data which would make it possible to prepare gender-transformative plans.
- Hundreds of workshops and trainings have been conducted for planners, managers, trainers, field-level workers, government and non-government, to help them understand gender disparities, sensitise them to gender issues, and instil a commitment to gender equality. Such workshops have also been conducted with police personnel, media persons, members of the judiciary, elected representatives of people and other public servants.
- Guidelines, check-lists, frameworks have been prepared to analyse plans and programmes to make them gender sensitive and gender transformative.
- Special units, cells, departments and commissions have been set up by NGOs, governments and the UN to plan and monitor progress towards equality. By 1985, 90 per cent of member countries had established an institutional body or system for promoting the status of women.
- Women's organisations have emerged in almost every country to work on a range of gender issues. Women's publishing, film-making, art, architecture, newspapers and magazines have flourished in many countries.

Some governments, UN organisations and NGOs have made special efforts to recruit women and train them for senior positions; and to make organisations, their policies, rules and work culture more women-friendly. Special gender indicators have been developed to measure the success of programmes aimed at women's empowerment and gender equality.

For making development more gender sensitive, government policies now increasingly emphasise qualitative inputs, focusing on inculcating self-confidence among women; generating awareness

about their rights; and training them for economic activity and employment. Efforts to improve women's access to critical inputs and productive resources such as land, houses and trees through joint or individual titles have been expanded to include support through credit (or small scale capital), marketing, training in skills/ management and technology. Developing women's organisations is now accepted as an effective strategy for promoting women's empowerment.

The most well-known initiative of the Government of India to promote gender equality in the political sphere is the 73rd Amendment, reserving one-third of elected seats in local government for women. Through this measure, an estimated one million women could emerge as leaders at the grassroots level in rural areas alone, 75,000 of them being chairpersons. The Government of India has also drafted a national policy for the empowerment of women. Reservation of one-third seats for them, even in Parliament and state legislatures, is being debated.³⁹

What exactly do gender sensitivity and gender sensitisation mean?

Different people mean different things by these words. The simple meaning of gender sensitivity is acknowledging that women are subordinated in most societies, and that this subordination is harmful not only for women and girls, but also for men and boys and the entire society. It means being aware of why men and women behave differently, and understanding their needs and concerns.



It also means understanding the implications and impact of different policies and programmes on women and men. In planning, gender sensitivity implies making plans which will not only not ignore and further marginalise women, but will take care of women's special needs and make efforts to involve and empower women. In short to transform gender relations.

According to feminist gender trainers, gender sensitivity means not only understanding but also challenging patriarchy and other interconnected hierarchies like those of caste, class, race and north-south. We believe gender sensitization is necessary



at all levels in all organisations. Acknowledging the feminist slogan "Personal is Political", we believe gender sensitization begins with each one of us, our families and organisations. It requires not only an intellectual understanding of concepts like gender and patriarchy but using this understanding to transform our own

ways of thinking and behaving. Understanding alone does not change social relations and social realities, what changes society is people's behaviour and actions. In other words gender sensitivity requires internalising our understanding and applying these insights to our behaviour. Transforming gender relations means demolishing the separation between theory and practice, personal and public, objective and subjective, rational and emotional. Gender sensitivity does not only mean "main (man) streaming" women, it means examining the mainstream from a feminist perspective. If it is patriarchal, unjust and unsustainable then women need to challenge and change it, instead of joining it.

Gender sensitivity also means acknowledging that ALL issues — economic, cultural, social or political — are women's issues because women represent half the human race.

Obviously, the opposite is also true: all the so-called women's issues (dowry, rape, pornography, female foeticide, infanticide, etc.) are

not just women's issues, they are social issues. It is unfortunate that for much too long only women and their organisations have been concerned with them. But it is heartening to see that some sensitive men are also taking up these issues now and starting groups like "Men Against Rape" or "Men Against Violence Against Women".

Gender sensitivity and gender justice definitely require women's equal participation in organisations and in decision-making processes but in addition they require a transformation in the practices and cultures of organisations. For example, while many NGOs are recruiting more women, their organisational culture continues to be male, and at times even hostile towards women. A careful scrutiny is therefore required in every organisation, of the language used, the jokes told, the songs sung, the comments passed on people's way of dressing, and so on.

Most NGOs expect their senior managers to work very long hours, to travel and work on weekends, etc. For women who have responsibilities at home it is not possible to live up to such expectations and hence to fill managerial positions. Therefore, instead of putting unnecessary pressure on women to put in longer hours of work, NGOs need to pressurise and encourage men to spend more time at home, and give more attention to their roles and responsibilities as parents, marriage partners and householders. Genuine changes in unjust gender relations can be brought about only through concrete changes in men's behaviour and activities. Men can understand, appreciate and help women only by sharing women's endless, repetitive and thankless work at home.

Gender sensitivity also requires understanding the situation of those women who have to combine their work at home with jobs outside. In addition to the double burden of work, women, specially those in management positions, face conflicting demands on their behaviour. A woman manager is expected to be tough,

cool, rational, competitive, in charge; but the same woman manager is expected to be submissive, caring, self-effacing as a wife and mother. Male managers face no such schizophrenic situations.

In the ultimate analysis being gender sensitive simply means being sensitive and caring; it means being against and opposing injustice and unfairness between men and women wherever it exists.

Has using the concept of gender contributed significantly to women's empowerment?

Concepts are basically analytical tools or theoretical constructs which help clarify our ideas and examine social reality in a more systematic way. They cannot by themselves change reality, although they may influence our perception of it and, in that sense, construct it. Gender is simply the concept that clarifies the fact that women and men are social categories or constructs, not merely biological categories.

However, some feminists think that this concept has theoretical problems. According to Maria Mies, the distinction between sex and gender follows the well known dualistic pattern of dividing "nature" from "culture". For women, she says, this division has had a long and disastrous tradition in western thought because women have been placed alongside nature ever since the rise of modern science. The duality between sex and gender is problematic because human sex and sexuality have never been purely biological affairs. Sex is as much a cultural and historical category as gender. By the dualistic splitting up of sex and gender, by treating the one as biological and the other as cultural, the door is again opened for those who want to treat the sexual difference between humans as a matter of our anatomy, or as matter.⁴⁰

Others see the need to reconsider the political and philosophical significance of biology. According to them gender is in part determined by sex, therefore some aspects of sex are still politically

relevant. For example, certain features of women's biology may mean that occasionally their needs are different from those of men, most evidently, in the case of child-bearing.⁴¹

However, more problematic than these theoretical distinctions is the way the concept of gender is being used today.

What do you see as the problems with the "gender business" ?

Hardly a workshop, paper, article or speech on women today is made without using the term gender. The enthusiasm for it is so great but the understanding so little that it is being used when it shouldn't be or it is being misused and misinterpreted. For example, we have heard people say "gender-ratio" instead of sex-ratio and "gender-disaggregated" data instead of sex-disaggregated data .

The main reason for this confusion and misuse is that most people have not really understood what this concept means.

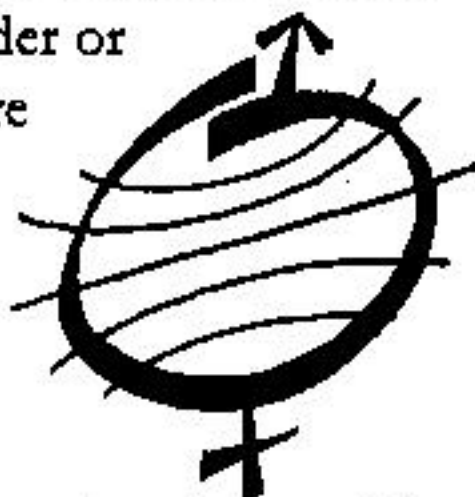
An elderly social worker in a remote area of Bangladesh, when asked what type of work he was doing, said "Aami gender kori" (I do gender); I suppose what he meant was, he was working for women's development. Terms like women's empowerment, women's autonomy or women's development are being replaced with gender equity and equality, with each person free to interpret them the way they want. So much so that a senior development expert once said to me : "What is all this fuss about gender and gender sensitization. Everyone knows what gender is, just take off everybody's clothes and you will see gender." The poor chap had missed the point completely. He did not realise that our clothes tell us more about gender than our bare bodies !



What are the reasons for the sudden popularity of the term ?

Gender has been popularised because it allows us to talk about both women and men and obliges us to look at relations between them. However, many people who use the word gender continue to talk only about women, and work only ON, FOR or WITH women.

Many others prefer it because it is neutral, i.e., it refers to both women and men and hence may be less threatening. It does not antagonise men the way other terms like "women's empowerment" or "patriarchy" do. But for many feminists, this is precisely the problem with this term — its neutrality. Gender or gender relations say nothing about the nature of these relations. Gender inequality, for example, does not mean women are unequal or subordinate it merely means that there is inequality between the genders.



Maria Mies maintains that it is not surprising that the word has readily been adopted by all kinds of people who may not otherwise have much sympathy for feminism, and may even be hostile to it. If, instead of 'sexual violence' we talk of 'gender violence', the shock is absorbed by an abstract term, which removes the whole issue from the realm of political commitment to that of apparently objective discourse.

The word women's subordination, on the other hand, does say who is subordinated and marginalised, and who should be in focus. So too, women's empowerment is unambiguous.

The term "patriarchy" (which is, of course, no substitute for the word gender, but which is used less and less by the gender wallis and wallas) is also not neutral. It clearly and unambiguously characterises the nature of gender relations-i.e., that men are in control, that we live in a male-ordered world. The details and

particulars of the male world need to be studied carefully, but it is clear who is in power and how that power needs to be redistributed.

Because the term gender is neutral, it is creating a lot of confusion. Because people have not been told what it is, why it was introduced and how it should be used they use it to suit their own thinking on the subject. We have innumerable men saying "If it is a gender cell why is there a woman incharge ?" or "Why are there no men in gender workshops ?" or "Why are you talking of women's empowerment in a gender workshop ?" or "Why are there no male gender trainers ?" Suddenly everything has to be fifty-fifty to ensure men are not left out, and to prove we are talking of gender. Suddenly a lot of people (mainly, but not only men) are concerned about men being left behind or left out, men not being included in everything. Before much justice has been achieved for women, the threat of possible injustice against men is becoming a concern.

Thus we find that the term gender often obscures power relationships rather than illuminating them. And it is being seen as a sanitised, neutral category. For many gender experts, gender is now a specialisation. It has been taken out of the living, interconnected world. One can talk of gender in the context of a project without mentioning patriarchy, or understanding and challenging the root causes of gender subordination.

Gender is also fast becoming a thing you "do" to others, specifically to "target groups" or so-called beneficiaries. If not in theory then in practice, the concern is often with gender at the "grass roots" level. When gender is just a project-related concern it does not threaten anyone. It is quite acceptable, it can be mainstreamed, unlike struggles against patriarchy which call for dismantling oppressive structures, institutions, attitudes. This is definitely threatening.

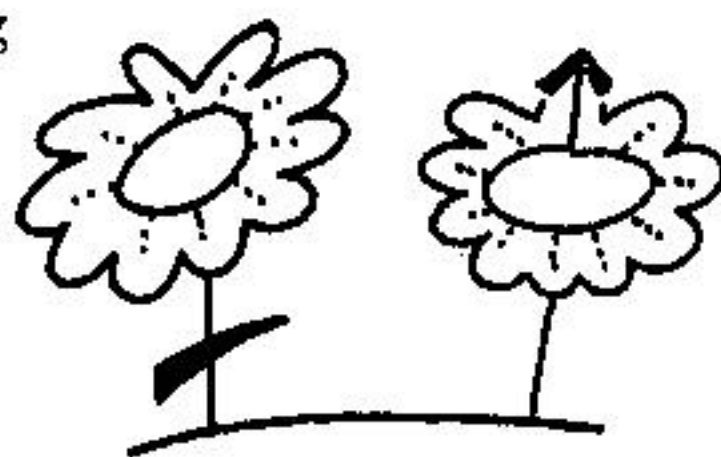
This is not to deny the possibility of using gender politically, and many feminists use it that way. But there is the real possibility of

the concept being used totally apolitically. However since nothing is apolitical, it may end up being used to obscure the real issue, i.e., patriarchal subordination. Because of this many of us in South Asia have been very reluctant to use this concept and, even now, use it very cautiously and only along with other concepts like patriarchy.

Although, gender interventions in development programmes vary widely in their understanding and purpose, the objective of most so-called gender sensitisation modules used by official agencies and consultants/trainers for male [and also female] policy makers, planners and implementers is to look at gender relations in order to enhance the effectiveness of development programmes and policies; to involve women in development programmes in order to tap their "productive usefulness", to "invest" in women. Gender equality and gender justice may not be their primary aim. These experts seldom address the issue of power in gender relations. I have often heard the term gender being used only to describe the different roles and responsibilities of men and women, or the different access and control they have to resources and decision-making. Many gender trainers do not go beyond describing the situation, and even when they do analyse the reasons for gender inequalities, they do not necessarily challenge them. Quite often, they may even base their development interventions on an existing gender division of labour.

Many gender trainers and experts treat the whole issue of gender as a technical matter; treat it as if by using a few tools of gender analysis gender inequalities can be removed. Such trainings and interventions, we feel, are not only incapable of challenging gender inequalities, they are depoliticising the issues and making change more difficult.

Saskia Wieringa has pointed out how development planners are



searching for easy schedules, quantifiable targets and simplicity, while addressing enormously complex situations. Instead of demonstrating flexibility and a desire to appreciate complexity, they are trying to bend social realities to fit their narrow frameworks.⁴²

Wieringa maintains that fundamental questions relating to women's gender interests are not being asked while planning development interventions. In the case of structural adjustment programmes, she argues, such questions include the following: Why does feminization of poverty occur? Why is it that women have to do unpaid tasks such as the care of the young, the elderly and the sick? Why are men not involved in these activities? Why is it that so many men drop out of the families they helped to create?

She continues, "There is a whole range of other relevant issues, such as the imbalance between the sexes in the distribution of food, luxury items and leisure time; the practice of invoking tradition to prevent women from moving into new areas of life, while men in the same circumstances are considered innovative; the lack of attention to issues of sustainability, environmental degradation and gender; the absence of women from the central positions in which political and economic decisions regarding their lives are being made; the tendency to view development as a mainly economic process, disregarding social aspects (even though a country's most vital resource is its people); the fact that sexual violence is rarely recognised as a legitimate development issue."⁴³

Considering the kind of "mainstream" gender work being done in South Asia today, we also feel that instead of encouraging commitment, flexibility, ecological and interconnected ways of looking at social realities many "gender experts" are dishing out very simplistic tools, frameworks and exercises.

It is not gender per se but this neutralisation of women's issues by a large number of "gender experts" which is cause for concern. Discussions on women's issues are thus being robbed of their



struggle aspects and of their militancy. This is a problem for many other trainers who believe that the challenge to patriarchy needs to be strengthened, not diluted, patriarchy and patriarchal privilege are definitely NOT on the decline. In fact, with the growing importance of economic liberalisation, fundamentalism and conservatism, patriarchy is resurgent.

While socialist feminists and eco-feminists expose and challenge the present development paradigm itself as patriarchal and ecologically destructive, the attempt of many mainstream gender exercises is to increase women's opportunities for "empowerment" within the present system. The relationship between patriarchy, caste, class, race, the state, colonialism/imperialism and the environment are seldom explored because they are defined as "political" issues !! The assumption is that accepting these hierarchies is apolitical.

It is therefore important to challenge trends that have the potential for depoliticising our issues. We need more clarity, commitment and conviction in order to challenge patriarchy and hierarchies of caste, class, religions and ethnicity in South Asia, and to make for progressive social change. The distinctions between planners and implementers, thinkers and doers, experts and non-experts need to be minimised, and a much closer interaction and co-operation between gender planning, feminist theory and the women's movement needs to take place. Rather than fight shy of feminism, our programmes for women's empowerment need to be more clearly feminist.

According to you are there any issues which need to be given more attention ?

Yes, at last two issues need to be given more attention than they have been so far, namely —

- Women's access to and control over natural resources like land, water and forests. Much more concrete action needs to be taken at the level of policies and programmes to give women access and control over these resources.
- Sharing of household work by men and boys.

A major reason for the subordination, lack of autonomy and ill-health among women in South Asia is the extreme burden of household work. According to the UNDP Human Development Report the total value of unpaid work done by women, globally, is USD 11 trillion. Development projects have been trying to integrate women into development, use their "human resources" and "capital" in the service of global production; more recently, many people have been working towards increasing women's participation in governance at all levels. Yet most working class women are already on the verge of collapse due to overwork. Why do we hear so little about reducing women's household responsibilities? Most programmes end up increasing women's work and responsibilities in the name of "women's development" and "empowerment", but we have to accept that one reason why women are absent from public office and senior management positions is that they have more than full-time work at home. Women's roles as housewives and mothers forces them into subordinate positions in paid employment. Since reproduction and caring for children and families are not likely to disappear, it is necessary to start a parallel movement of men towards family kitchens and homes. If we want women managers, politicians and civil society leaders then we need more men to be mothers, care-takers, nurses and cooks. Women can exercise autonomy over their bodies and lives only when the burden of reproductive work is reduced.

As Maria Mies says, "Men have to share the responsibility for the immediate production of life, for childcare, housework, the care of the sick and the old, the relationship work, all work so far subsumed under the term "housework". . . This would then immediately have the effect that men would have to spend more

time with children, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the sick, etc., and would have less time for their destructive production in industry, less time for their destructive research, less time for their destructive leisure-time activities, less time for their wars. Positively put, they would regain the autonomy and wholeness of their own bodies and minds, they would re-experience work as both a burden and enjoyment, and finally also develop a different scale of values altogether with regard to work. Only by doing this life-producing and life-preserving work themselves will they be able to develop a concept of work which transcends the exploitative, capitalist, patriarchal concept.

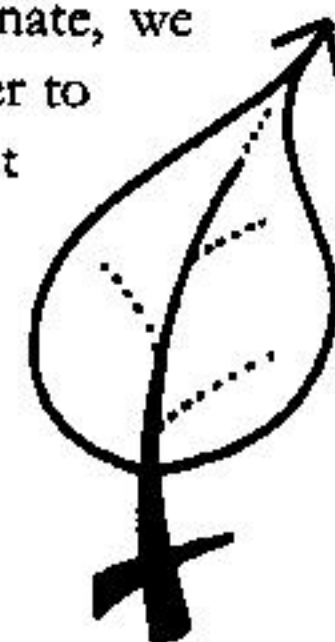
... The processes for the liberation of women and men are inter-related. It is not possible for women in our societies to break out of the cages of patriarchal relations, unless the men begin a movement in the same direction. A men's movement against patriarchy should not be motivated by benevolent paternalism, but by the desire to restore to themselves a sense of human dignity and respect. How can men respect themselves if they have no respect for women." 44

Some people are of the opinion that "doing gender" requires working with women and men together, not working only with women, or men.

I have heard these views, but I do not agree. Gender and development does not mean you should not have separate groups of women and men, or conduct separate workshops for them, or even that you should have female and male trainers in every workshop. I believe our analysis should focus on the social construction of male and female identities and on gender relations. Such an analysis can be done in separate groups, if that is what the situation demands. In fact, in some communities it is necessary to have separate meetings with women to provide them with the space to talk and think freely, to develop bonds of solidarity and to

formulate common strategies. Similarly, it may be necessary to have separate meetings and workshops with men, again to allow frank discussions. Where women and men are comfortable in mixed groups, joint workshops and meetings can be held.

Again, focusing on gender does not mean we cannot speak of women or women's empowerment any more. As long as gender relations are hierarchical and women are subordinate, we need to strengthen women's empowerment in order to have gender equality. It is premature to think that men and women should be treated equally at all times even before gender equality has been achieved. Let us not forget that we started talking of gender only because inequalities between men and women persist.

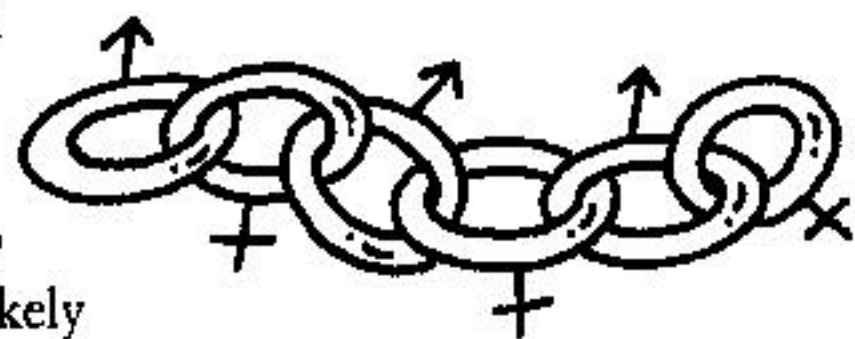


But surely the gender debate is not a women versus men debate ?

No, the issue of gender equality is not one of women versus men, nor is the conflict between all women and all men. It is between those who believe in and want equality and those who wish to maintain male domination. It is between belief systems and ideologies. All of us know that there are men and women in both these camps. There are those who accept and benefit from patriarchy and wish to retain the status quo, and those who wish to work for social change. Many men are today examining their rights and privileges, their roles and responsibilities. For the first time masculinity, male power, male sexuality, male knowledge systems, and male ordering of social relations are on the table for critical examination, and the examiners are both men and women.

Therefore it is both simplistic and incorrect to think that the fight for gender equality is a fight between women and men.

But there is no denying that there is also some conflict in the interests of men and women; as women begin to empower themselves it is likely



that this conflict will be heightened, in the short term. But any struggle for equality will entail some polarisation before an equitable balance is achieved.

Why do gender-related issues evoke such an emotional, even hostile, response?

Maria Mies puts it well. She says most men and women try to avoid examining gender relations, because they are afraid that if they allow themselves to become aware of the true nature of the man-woman relationship in our societies then the family, the last island of peace and harmony in the brutal world of money-making, power games and greed, will be destroyed. Moreover, if they allow this issue to enter their consciousness, they will have to admit that they themselves, women and men, are not only victims (women) on one side and villains (men) on the other, but that they are also accomplices in the system of exploitation and oppression that binds women and men together. If they wish to come to a truly free human relationship, they will have to give up their complicity. This is not so only for men whose privileges are based on this system, but also for women whose material existence is bound up with it.

It is feminists who have dared to break the conspiracy of silence about the oppressive, unequal man-woman relationship and who want to change it. We believe that more and more people now realise that equality between men and women is essential for building just and peaceful relationships within families, and communities. Women and men everywhere have to join hands to achieve gender equality, and to create a world which is just and peaceful for all.

Does this imply that gender concerns in development go beyond integrating women into development?

While some organisations only wish to add the "women's component" to the existing institutions and systems, we believe we need a radical transformation of patriarchal society, as well as of the notions and practices of development, to achieve genuine social change.

As we have already seen, development plans and projects can and do have many anti-women (and anti-poor) biases. Instead of simply integrating women into such plans and projects, we need to challenge and change them. There is enough evidence today to move that the present development paradigm with its emphasis on economic growth, pursuit of profit and individual interests has widened the gap between women and men, the rich and poor, and rich and poor countries. In addition it has led to ecological devastation. The UNDP Human Development Reports have provided statistics from all over the world which show that the present form of development has forced many people to become jobless, voiceless, ruthless, rootless and futureless (UNDP, Human Development Report 1996). Today 358 millionaires control more money than 2.5 billion poor people in the world. The budgets of some multinational corporations are larger than those of many national governments. This kind of polarisation and centralisation of power leads to greater tensions, conflict and violence.

A shift in development thinking will have to be accompanied by radical changes in our organisations, and in our social, economic and political systems. It will also require a major change of values — e.g. from self-assertion and competition to co-operation and social justice; from expansion to conservation; from material acquisition to inner growth. Engendering development paradigms and practices is one way of transforming development as we have known it, and making it more equitable and beneficial for all.

Achieving gender equality requires looking once again at the “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics and values (domination – subservience, competition – co-operation, self-assertion – giving in, exploitation – caring and nurturing) and seriously thinking :

- does or should development mean subordinating “feminine” characteristics and values and valourising “masculine” values and characteristics ?
- does gender and development mean having women enter the public arena and behaving like men?
- does the present polarised, conflict-ridden, ecologically devastated world require more competition or more co-operation ? More exploitation of nature or more caring and nurturing of nature ? In other words, does the present-day world need more “feminine” or “masculine” qualities ?

In fact we need to go a little further and ask whether it is correct to label values and characteristics as feminine and masculine at all? Aren't these values human values? Don't both men and women need and develop both “masculine” and “feminine” aspects ? Shouldn't women and men both be rational and emotional, self-assertive and sensitive to others, entrepreneurs and home-makers, public and domestic figures? If women are entering public spaces and assuming responsibilities in these spaces, shouldn't men enter the domestic space and assume responsibilities for child care, nursing and home management?



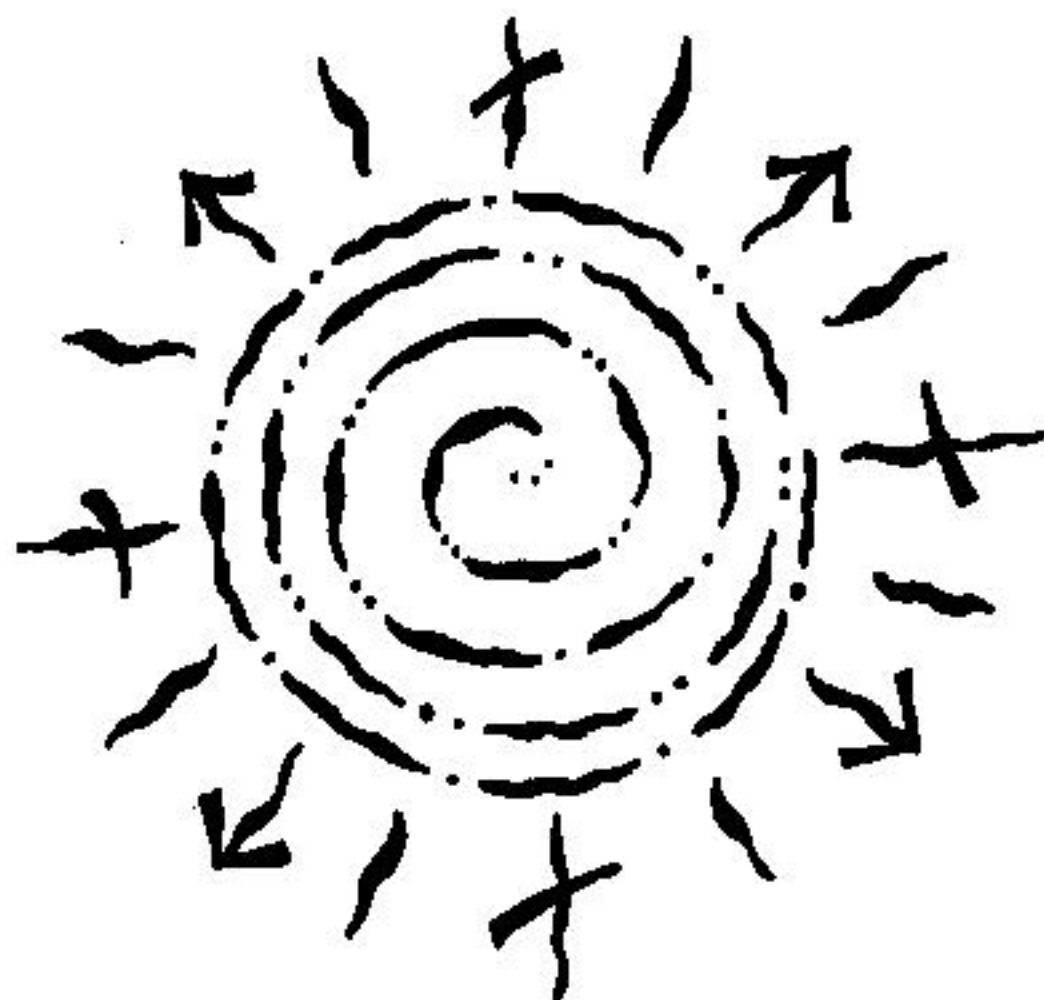
WOMEN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOUSE. THAT IS WHY THEY SHOULD BE IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT.

Gender equality requires each one of us, man and woman, to look into ourselves and overcome our negative “male” (being aggressive, domineering, competitive, self-centred) and “female” (being submissive, fearful, diffident) qualities. It also requires that all of us, girls and boys, men and women, nurture the positive male and female qualities. Each one of us needs to be strong and caring, fearless and sensitive, emotional and rational. We believe the present-day world, which is experiencing unprecedented and intolerable levels of violence and environmental degradation, can be healed only through the large-scale practice of qualities like caring and nurturing in the domestic and public spheres.

At yet another level, we need to question the separation between economics and ethics, politics and morality, science and religion. This separation has led to unethical economic pursuits, immoral political power and the irresponsible and destructive use of science. We believe value systems and ethics shouldn't be peripheral to economics, politics, science and technology but should constitute their very basis and driving force. We need holistic and ecological ways of thinking and being. For us all these concerns are part of our concern in engendering development. We believe gender and development issues cannot be treated in narrow and mechanistic ways. These debates cannot be limited to how many women, how many men, questions. In the context of our search for sustainability, gender and development debates have to discuss the transformation of the present gender, caste, class, race, north-south divisions of labour which are totally non-reciprocal and exploitative. We also have to raise basic questions about the goal of development and

the purpose of human life. The following issues demand greater attention than they are being given today in most gender discourses.

- Should the objective of human effort be the production of life and use value or merely production of things and profit?
- Can human beings remain human if they are completely alienated from nature and organic matter?
- Shouldn't communities be self-sufficient in satisfying their basic needs to avoid blackmail and exploitation?
- Can sustainable communities and families be established without the autonomy of women over their own bodies and lives, without men sharing the responsibility for the immediate production of life, and all work so far subsumed under the term "housework"?



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